

SEPTEMBER 1978

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A WIDOW FOR KILLING

New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel
by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE SAME OLD GRIND

by BILL PRONZINI

A MAN COULD GET KILLED

by EDWARD D. HOCH



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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

**SEPT, 1978
VOL. 42, NO. 9**

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

A WIDOW FOR KILLING

by BRETT HALLIDAY

When a woman is as beautiful and amoral as Pamela Johnson — and has a millionaire for a husband — she can detonate trouble like a nuclear bomb without even trying 4 to 50

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 42, No. 9, September, 1978. Published monthly by Renown Publications, Inc. P.O. Box 1084, Reseda, CA 91335. Subscription, One year (12 issues) \$12.00; Two Years (24 issues) \$20.00; single copies \$1.00. Second-class postage paid at Los Angeles, Calif., and at additional mailing offices. Events and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1978 by Renown Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright conventions. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster — return P.O. Box 1084, Reseda, CA 91335.

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A Widow

For Killing

by BRETT HALLIDAY

One of Shayne's problems was to determine whether luscious blonde Pamela Johnson was as deadly as she seemed. Finding its solution all but cost him his life.

IN THE MIDST of the noise and confusion of Miami Beach disco *Sly Chrome*, Lucy Hamilton stood up and said to Mike Shayne, "Michael, I believe that man has a gun!"

Shayne flicked his head to the left and saw a tall young man with

a red head and beard not ten feet away. His eyes were wild. In his right hand, a .38 revolver pointed into the whirl of the dancers.

It was pointing now, since she had suddenly stood up, right at Lucy Hamilton.

Shayne knew instinctively that

the wild-eyed man was about to shoot. One of the detective's hands shoved Lucy hard, just as the revolver fired, making little noise against the chaos of noise in the disco. Lucy fell backwards with a cry, caromed off a dancer and slid to the floor.

In the same motion, Shayne flung an empty chair at the man. Then he was around the small table that he and Lucy occupied, bending over his fallen secretary without a further look at the gunman. He knew the chair had taken the man down.

Lucy was more than a secretary to Shayne. As he picked her up, his quick mind tallied the ironic thought that in all the dangerous cases he had handled, Lucy had seldom run into physical violence. Yet tonight, when they had taken an evening off, a stranger stuck a gun almost in her face and fired.

Gathering Lucy up in his arms he murmured, "Angel, did it hit you?" His heart pounded in anger. Lucy, shot by a wild gunman...

Her brown eyes were closed, her brown hair flung back from the left side of her face. There was blood. It was too dim to see well. Shayne cursed and his usually agile fingers fumbled. An icy stab of fear for his woman momentarily slowed his dexterity.

Squinting, the detective examined the smooth skin of her left cheek. Blood, yes, but —

Her brown eyes opened. Then,

in a small voice, as if apologizing: "Michael, I think he — he shot off my earring!"

It was true. The golden earring had been neatly clipped off by the bullet. Since Lucy's ears were pierced, there was a slight tear in the flesh and a trace of blood.

Shayne guessed almost at once that someone else had been hit by the bullet. He had half-heard a scream as he bent over Lucy. Now there was a scuffle of feet, a babble of sound behind him, more yells — and then a second shot.

The room filled with confusion. Under the loud beat of the music some young people continued to dance, unaware of the shooting, while those close by panicked. Some tried to dive under the tiny cocktail tables, some tried to break for the exits. Others jostled each other, peering around to see what was going on.

Shayne cut through the forest of bodies like a shark slashing through kelp after a quarry. He was furious. A couple of more inches and the woman he cared most about, his closest friend and sometimes lover, had almost bought it due to the madman with a gun. A couple of men had grappled with the gunman. As the lights sprang up, Shayne faced the bearded maniac as he closed in on him.

The face was Irish like his, freckled, the shoulders broad like his. The man wore a crazed look as he shouted. "That's for Pamela!

That's for Pamela Nichols Johnson!"

Suddenly the gunman jerked loose from his opponents and ran. Shayne might have reached him but for a fat security guard rushing across the room, who slammed into the big detective and tripped him. The two of them careened into a knot of people. That seemed to Shayne to be the sum total of the disco, noise and wall-to-wall people. By the time Shayne uncoiled his big body from that of the guard, who was stunned by the encounter, their quarry was gone. The redhead swept the parking lot without results and finally turned back to the *Sly Chrome* with his range only slightly abated. His fists were jammed deep in his pockets.

Friend, he thought, I'm going to nail you to the hard wall and peel your hide. Nobody, but nobody, was going to get away with taking a free shot at Lucy Hamilton, accident or no.

So much for his evening out with Lucy and her desire to try a different scene. Since they were formally dressed and in Miami Beach, Shayne would have preferred a Lobster Thermidor at St. Alban's Hotel in the restaurant, but Lucy had cajoled him.

"We ought to keep in touch with the times, Michael. Too many hours go to your clients and their worlds. I've heard about discos but never been to one."

Shayne didn't think a disco trip would be that educational, yet he

couldn't deny his secretary, lovely in a soft rust pants suit, her brown eyes glowing, her supple body alive with the pleasure of an evening out together. He basked in the glow of her enjoyment, despite the pounding music, the mechanistic jerking of the disco dancers and the aura of ersatz excitement that seemed plastic to him.

The wild shot of the gunman put an end to the recreational part of the evening for Shayne. Back inside the disco, he let a waitress lead him to the manager's office, where he found that anxious worthy hovering over Lucy, over a blonde young woman dressed in white satin, over a distraught young man.

"Terrible! Terrible! Such lunatic times!" moaned the manager. He was a sad-faced old-young ex-mod with a walrus mustache. Shayne dismissed his presence at once. He was more worried about his club than the victims.

Lucy soothed the woman in satin. Lucy held a wet towel to the woman's shoulder and clucked at her like a mother hen. The woman, her turquoise eyes dazed, her soft face filled with distress, continued to express shock.

"I was just dancing with Greg," she told Shayne, looking up at him. "I was just dancing and I felt this terrible pain in my shoulder." She acted as if the tall private detective with the rugged features

were a father to whom she could bring her troubles.

"Sure," said Shayne gently. "Sure." He pressed her white fingers and found them cold.

He lifted the towel and looked at her wound. It was not much worse than Lucy's, a groove in the triangle of skin that joined neck and shoulder. Lucy murmured that the bullet had gone on to strike the wall and that no one else had been hit. The manager fussed about, serving brandy and telling them that the police and an ambulance were on the way.

The young man who had sat quietly since Shayne Shayne first entered the room suddenly jumped to his feet.

"That mad killer is still out there!" he cried. "I won't get Pam home alive. I know it!"

Shayne looked at the man closely. His clothes suggested wealth. His features were regular and he was handsome. He looked to be about thirty, approximately the same age as the blonde in white satin. His mouth wore a self-indulgent twist. Shayne realized he was in a state of shock like his companion.

"I don't think you have to worry," said the redhead. "The last I saw of him, he ran as if he wanted to find a deep hole to hide in." Shayne didn't add that, if he had caught up with the man whose bullet nicked Lucy, this couple wouldn't have to worry about the gunman for weeks to come.

Something soft and satiny pressed against Shayne's chest. "You've got to help us!" pleaded the blonde. "Please take me to my husband. I have to go to Hollis."

Embarrassed, the detective looked over the gleaming blonde head at Lucy. Pam's shapely body pressed his with total contact and he felt her tremble as his hand fell automatically on her back.

"Easy, Pam. No one will hurt you any more tonight," said Lucy. She tried to pry Pam loose from Shayne and restore the towel to the wound. But Pam clung to the redhead with determination, her face turned up in entreaty.

"Will you take me to my husband?" she begged.

Shayne had the weird sensation that, even in her distress, the satin blonde used her body in a wanton fashion. Her hug was one of fear and seduction. He rolled his eyes at Lucy, who smiled in immediate understanding.

"I'm sure you'll be taken home safely," he told Pam, seeking to soothe the disturbed woman and ease the inappropriate hug.

The handsome young man now gripped both of Lucy's hands. "My name's Greg Johnson. My father's Hollis Johnson, the millionaire, and Pam is his wife. You look like good people. Maybe you could help us out."

It was Lucy's turn to roll her eyes, but there was no need of an answer. The door burst open and the tableau was broken up by the

arrival of the police and the paramedics. Lucy was quickly checked and released, while Shayne was able to give full attention to the double brandy the manager served.

Pam's attention seemed to slide easily from Shayne to the officer in charge. The redhead and Lucy lingered long enough to learn that the gunman's name was Brady Nichols, that he was the ex-husband of the woman in satin, Pamela Nichols Johnson, and that she had left him to marry the millionaire. Since then, Brady Nichols had made all sorts of trouble for her.

Shayne and Lucy were about to leave when the words of the officer stopped them.

"We've been looking for you, Mrs. Johnson," the policeman told Pam. "I'm afraid there's more bad news for you. Your husband, Hollis Johnson, has been found dead over in Miami. We've been looking for this Brady Nichols also. We think he did it."

II

MIKE SHAYNE WAS watching Greg Johnson's face. The son of the millionaire winced, but beyond that he didn't show shock at all. Even more bizarre was Pam's reaction.

"Oh, my God! Hollis is dead?" The blonde's blue eyes rolled wildly. Then she grasped the shoulders of the police officer, that



wanton body once again turning to male support. "But Brady didn't do it. Why, Brady loves me. You all can see that." She touched the bandage at her shoulder. "You see, Brady loves me!" She appealed to the room at large.

Shayne and Lucy withdrew, subdued. Outside the disco, Lucy said, "I'm sorry, Michael. My evening away from the world of crime didn't work out."

"Forget that, Angel. We were lucky." Then, after a moment's reflection, "Hollis Johnson murdered! He was a big man in Miami. I hate to think what will happen to those innocents now."

"Babes in the woods," she agreed in her soft Southern accent. "I seldom feel sorry for the rich, but those two are heading for rough waters."

Later, in the restaurant of the St. Albans Hotel, as Shayne

mangled a juicy steak and Lucy enjoyed her *cote de veau Cordon Bleu*, the big detective thought about his newspaper friend, Tim Rourke, and wondered if the reporter were working on this Hollis Johnson murder. He probably was, the redhead thought.

Shayne was right. Miles away and a couple of hours earlier, Tim Rourke of the Miami *Daily News* had been one of the first on the scene where the corpse was found. That turned out to be a park bench in Flamingo park, not far from the apartment of the hard-bitten and cynical reporter.

The scene was eerie, even to Tim with his years of hard-bitten experience as a reporter. The body lay flat on a park bench as if the old man had fallen asleep there. He was short enough so that his feet did not dangle over the end of the bench. He was bald-headed, had a hawk nose and the waxy look of the dead. Half-closed eyes in the bright police lights stared at the skies as if pondering secrets not known to the living.

One side of his head had been crushed, and the expert from homicide thought it could very well have been the butt of a revolver that ended the millionaire's life.

Yet it wasn't the corpse or the setting that sent a tingle up Tim's spine. It was how the corpse was dressed, or not dressed, and what Hollis Johnson held in his hand.

The dead man was in his shirt-sleeves, without hat or coat although the evening was chilly. He wore a narrow black tie, quite inappropriate to his expensive shirt and slacks. His right hand clasped three small coins — nickels.

Like an actor in a movie, Hollis lay quietly on his bench, a mute figure lighted by police flood-lights as Homicide worked. The setting was fleshed out and bordered by three police cars, their spinning lights flickering off the trees, while blue-clad figures moved, whispering, and the usual crowd of curious onlookers served as sombre-faced extras.

"Gentry's got a big one with this," sighed the Homicide detective in charge. "He may come here himself."

"It may not be too tough," said Tim, "Old Hollis had one outstanding enemy. A young stud, Brady Nichols." He gestured toward the coins the corpse held in its palm. A police photographer snapped a picture just then.

"Hollis Johnson married Brady's ex-wife, Pamela," Tim went on, relying on his card-file memory. "Brady was so shook up that he made trouble at the wedding. Sneaked up on the chauffeur of the marriage car and knocked him out. Drove the Caddy right up the church steps and crashed it into the doors. It made the front page of the *News*."

The detective looked at the

coins. "So the old guy could've lived long enough after he was hit to pull those coins out of his pocket to tell us who did it."

"One way to look at it," said Tim. "Also, he could've been killed by another party who knew of the blood feud. Who planted the nickels to point to Brady Nichols. I'm no detective. I leave that up to you boys."

"Well, *one* thing we know," said the detective. "Johnson wasn't killed here. There's no car. A rich man like you tell me he is — he'd be more apt to have a big car, perhaps with a chauffeur, too. There's nothing like that around here."

"Curioser and curioser," said Tim. "Why the park? Why no coat or hat? Why that funny tie? Do the nickels mean anything? You've got yourself a case, my friend — and I've got myself a story."

Tim was sorry that the old man was dead. He was sorry to see most death by murder, but it was juicy copy. By-line and front page, with wire service coverage. Remembering the sweet little ex-lounge singer the old boy married, there'd be plenty of follow-up. Tim's scarecrow body, cigaret jaunty, moved with energy tonight. He felt like a young reporter again, with this big story breaking...

Next morning, Shayne stopped by Joe's Diner for breakfast

instead of fixing it himself at his apartment. While he polished off scrambled eggs, thick bacon, plenty of toast and two cups of coffee, he also ingested Tim's story about the Johnson murder in the *News*.

It looked as if Tim — and the city of Miami — had a real zinger that would capture national attention for a few days. Primarily this was due to the heavy suspicion that fell on Brady Nichols, a dangerous fugitive, still at large, with a healthy assist from the fact that Hollis Johnson was an unconventional multi-millionaire.

Then, of course, there was the sexy ex-lounge singer, Pamela, who made a splashy picture — shoulder bandage, white satin and all. She had already become the White Satin Widow and Shayne knew that was all it needed to give the case major prominence — a catchy sobriquet hung on a sexy central figure.

He sighed. Above all, he wanted ten minutes alone with this Brady Nichols who had given him those sickening moments last night when Shayne thought Lucy was shot. Fat chance! Every policeman and alert citizen in town was on the lookout for Nichols.

It was a little later than usual and he strode out of the diner for his Buick — to stop short in his tracks several feet away. Speaking of the devil...

Pamela Nichols Johnson leaned against his car, her arms folded.

peering in his direction through blue sunglasses. She wore pink slacks this morning and a white satin blouse, the collar touching the edge of her bandage. Her spun-gold hair gleamed fourteen carat in the morning sun.

Greg Johnson, her satellite as he had been last night, lolled against the rear fender. Another young man, a stranger, pasty-faced and jittery, stood by his front fender.

Pam no sooner recognized Shayne than she sped straight at him and flung herself into his arms. Her soft body clung to his and her face smiled up at him. She kissed him on the cheek and hugged him while a couple of passers-by stared.

"Oh, Mr. Shayne, I had to thank you in person for saving my life last night."

"I wasn't aware I did that," the detective said. He hoped he looked perfectly at ease, as if greeting a daughter or young relative, but inside he did feel startled.

"You threw a chair at Brady. I saw it, just before he shot," she said. "It was so very kind of you."

Shayne eased himself out of her embrace that once again was wanton, yet oddly impersonal. Once again he sensed her offbeat emotional pattern.

"Hello, Mr. Shayne." Greg Johnson managed to look exactly like a mannequin in the men's

department of an expensive store, elegantly dressed, jaunty and vacuous.

"Mr. Shayne, my client has come to hire you for a very important task which we feel you're highly qualified to handle, due to the fact that you are the city's most outstanding private investigator with a spotless reputation and a history of successful—"

"Who are you?" Shayne asked, cutting through the verbiage.

"I am Bill Stanishaw, Mrs. Nichols' private personal attorney, selected because she feels it incumbent—"

"I've seen you around," said Shayne. "You book night-club acts, don't you?"

The young man blushed and stood stiffly at attention, his fingers straddling the seams of his trousers.

"Although I am a trained lawyer, and proud to be a member of that noble profession, it is true that my activities include certain nightclub bookings, which I once obtained for Pam White, whom you know as—"

During the wordy discourse, the redhead's eyes narrowed as he tried to compute what was going on. The two unworldly young people had spawned a third, all three acting on the lip of the weird.

"How did you know to find me here?" Mike Shayne interrupted Stanishaw's monolog.

"Certain bartenders, such as Pat at The Beef House, and others, informed me of your habits," replied the lawyer, who was obviously used to being interrupted. "I checked last night when Pam spoke to me."

"So we followed you this morning, and we're all ready to hire you!" said Pam brightly.

"Young lady, I do not conduct my business on the public sidewalks," said Shayne. "I have an office and I keep regular hours."

"Certain people may be there already," said Greg. "We thought we'd reach you first."

Shayne said, "You want me to find your husband's killer, Mrs. Johnson. Unfortunately, in this case, I can only advise you to rely on Chief Gentry and the Miami Police. They are very good."

He was glad to name his old friend, Will Gentry, and pass up this offer. He certainly didn't want these three kooks for clients. He left them standing at the curb, Pam wistfully waving after the Buick. If he was not mistaken, he saw a TV mobile unit bearing down on them, so they weren't likely to follow him further.

Greg and Pam — were they really kooks, or was there a deadly intelligence operating beneath those innocent exteriors? It was almost too convenient that they had been in a public place at the time Pam's husband was killed. It was even more convenient that there was a shooting disturbance

to spotlight their presence at the *Sly Chrome*.

He doubted that they wanted to hire him. They wanted to prevent somebody else from hiring him. He sped on to his office on Flagler Street. He found a restored Lucy in the anteroom when he reached it.

"Sitting in your private office right now," she told him, *sotto voce*, "are three men worth about fifty million dollars among them. Messrs. Grimshaw, Fox and Adams. It's the Hollis Johnson case."

Shayne nodded. "I had a forewarning I might have clients. How's your ear?"

"I think I can hear better after the operation." She smiled. "Seriously, I'm glad to have a tidbit to talk about. My friends know I work for a private detective and expect me to offer them bloody tales."

"Angel, you're wacky." He shook his head and went on into his private office.

He spun his hat accurately onto the hatrack while three mature gentlemen watched him soberly. They were all well-dressed and looked prosperous. They also looked sombre. Grimshaw sat upright like a pet begging for food, Fox was a fat man who lolled, Adams was of medium height, medium complexion, medium voice. He was spokesman.

He told Shayne they were all close friends of the dead man, that

the four of them had an informal poker club which had met weekly for years, that they sometimes shared financial projects. They were extremely disturbed by the death of Hollis Johnson.

"In our years together, there've been a lot of ups and downs," said Adams. "Hollis Johnson was — special — to us."

To Shayne's surprise, he pulled out his handkerchief and touched his eyes.

Fox spoke for the first time. "Hollis pulled me out of a bad corner. I didn't approve of his lifestyle. He was splashy but, damn it, he was a real man in a plastic age, a good friend and I liked him." There was no denying the genuine emotion in Fox's voice.

Grimshaw said more primly, "We intend to see the killer caught."

It took Shayne only a few questions to understand what was going on. The trio of Johnson's millionaire friends did not approve of Hollis' marriage and they did not approve of Pamela Nichols Johnson.

They all felt that if Hollis had not met her he would still be alive. No wonder Greg and Pam had stopped him on the street and tried to hire him first. The three millionaires versus the three young kooks. Shayne shook his head. A lot of phone calls must have burned wires last night.

"I'm sure the police can handle

this case properly," he told them.

It was Grimshaw who put it succinctly. "Strange things have been going on between Hollis, his son, that young woman and Brady Nichols — for some time. Unfortunately, Hollis was not the sort to unburden himself. The police may solve the case, as you say. But we want insurance."

"Money's no object," said Adams. "Hollis was a strong fighter for the underdog. He had a bright mind and was a warm friend. A really decent man surviving in an indecent age. We don't intend to see the dogs of the night pull him down and feed off his sustenance and reputation."

Shayne spun in his swivel chair and looked out the window at the vista of Miami. The case was interesting. Beyond that he very much wanted a short personal interview with Brady Nichols.

"Gentlemen, I'll take your case."

The three were grateful, but Shayne warned them as they left, "This case may not work out as you hope. I'm seeking a killer and I'm not interested in personal vendettas."

III

SHAYNE'S FIRST STOP was a large, prosperous looking garage in downtown Miami. The sign read, CONSOLIDATED SERVICE — *Brady Nichols, Owner.*" The entire establishment took up a

half block and Shayne figured that Nichols must have fifty employees on that large floor, about half of which looked Cuban. There were bays for grease and lube jobs, bays with underpits for heavy mechanical work, a section for painting and retouch work and, as frosting on the cake, a small car wash along one street.

"Yes, we have a complete set-up here," the manager in charge, one Stegner, told Shayne. "About the only thing we don't do is pump gas."

The man wore a dirty white coat and carried a clipboard. He was thin, quick-speaking and wore glasses. He led Shayne into a spacious office where a large empty desk, tagged with a desk sign *Brady Nichols*, gave mute testimony to the absence of the owner, now considered a dangerous fugitive by the Miami Police.

"Brady built this business up from nothing," said Stegner. "He wanted a place where the customer could get everything from a headlight replaced to a major overhaul. Brady understands cars and the kind of people it takes to keep 'em running. Two years ago he brought me all the way from Chicago to apply modern methods — diagnostics and the like."

The man looked weary. He took off his glasses and pinched his nose, then rubbed his eyes.

"Since my wife was tired of snow and winter winds, I jumped at the chance."

"It looks like a first-class operation," said Shayne.

The movement of the employees, the cheerful sounds of metal being worked, of machines humming and motors idling, the smell of the dankness associated with garages, oil, hot metal, exhaust, the white fluorescent lights — it looked like a busy, successful, alert operation.

But Stegner shook his head.

"Mr. Shayne, this business is failing. Brady's taken out too many loans on it. The banks finally cut him off. Finally, he could only get loans from one source — Hollis Johnson."

Shayne made a quick mental note.

"I thought Johnson and Nichols were enemies."

"The blackest — a battle of egos. Hollis took Brady's wife and he was in the process of taking over his business also. Two days ago, Brady had to get another loan from Johnson — and this time it gave Johnson majority control of this place." Stegner sighed. "I don't know what's going to happen now."

That last loan could have been enough to start Brady shooting, thought Shayne. He could imagine the excruciating agony of the garage owner at losing both his wife and his business to one man.

"Why was the business failing, do you think?"

Stegner shook his head, thin lips tight. "Woman trouble, Mr.

Shayne. Pamela Nichols, pure and simple. A man hooked on the wrong woman in this world is in deep trouble. The business was fine until he met Pamela and married her. From then on, the long slide started."

Stegner didn't want to go into much detail about that — but Shayne sensed that, once he met Pamela, Nichols shot off in a bizarre direction and lifestyle that led to his ruin.

"He became obsessed with the idea that his wife could become a big recording star. He spent money, lots of it, on her career. But from the standpoint of his business, the worst mistake was the hours he spent in the night-clubs. We didn't see him early in the morning any more, and this is an early morning business, when people bring their cars in. He was irritable a lot. His interest in the business lagged."

"How long ago did all this start?"

Stegner told Shayne that Brady met and married Pam a few months before Stegner himself had been hired. Shayne got the impression that the load had fallen on the new manager and that Stegner was tired of it.

"I almost quit last month to go back north again," said Stegner. "But of course now..." He shrugged.

There was a loud crash from the shop, followed by a babble of voices in Spanish and English. The

tired manager seemed to lose his fatigue. He snapped the button on the loudspeaker at his desk and his voice rang throughout the work floor. At once things got very quiet.

Shayne excused himself and Stegner moved from the office with a purposeful stride and fire in his eyes. The pleasant, affable, slightly weary man in the dirty white coat, who was capable of greeting worried customers with a smile of confidence and respectful words. . . that was only one side of Stegner's character, Shayne decided.

As he approached his car, Shayne ran into another altercation. A silver Mercedes had pulled up and stopped in front of the Service Entrance. A small Spanish-speaking employee argued with a large man in a porkpie hat, a man with a broad face, flushed with anger.

Just as Shayne came alongside, the big man doubled up a fist and hit the Cuban squarely on the jaw. It was not the kind of a blow one would expect to see in a sudden confrontation of two strangers.

It was a mean, deliberate blow. The Cuban took it directly and went down flat on the cement floor. He looked up at the broad-faced man, stunned. The bigger man went for him, trying to kick the Cuban, who scurried away on his hands and knees.

The Mercedes owner kicked air — because Mike Shayne had

grabbed him by the shoulder and halted him in his tracks.

"Don't do that, friend," said the redhead in a low forceful voice.

The man spun around to face Shayne, his face red, his eyes murderous. Then he saw the detective's size, rugged face, direct gaze.

"Who the hell are you?" he said, truculent but somewhat less angrily.

"I'm Mike Shayne, private detective — also a man who hates to see a big bastard like you jump on a smaller type. Or kick a man when he's down."

The murderous look washed out of his face to be replaced first by an intense stare and then with a look of fear. There was a conditioned slyness in that look.

"Yeah, well, I — kinda lost the old cool." The switch to humility was altogether too fast. The man pulled away and lumbered back to the silver car. Shayne went on to his Buick, frowning. The attacker jumped into the Mercedes, spun it backwards with a squeal of tires and shot swiftly away.

Some instinct drove Shayne. He was into his car and following within seconds. He caught up with the Mercedes in the second block.

Well, now, friend, Shayne thought. *Here I am, and there you are, and what do we all do next?*

What the man did was rev up his car and take off as if all the hounds in hell were after him. Shayne stayed right with him. The

man was fairly good, but he obviously didn't know this part of Miami and Shayne did. Furthermore, the redhead had put in his share of time behind the wheel, both following and eluding others who followed him. His car was almost an extension of himself.

What now, friend? thought Mike Shayne.

They had left the business district and were traveling, rather too fast, in a semi-residential district. The man suddenly ducked into a side street and the low center of gravity of the small car made it possible for him to make a turn that the detective couldn't in the larger Buick.

Shayne wound back quickly — and there sat the Mercedes at the curb, quiet and totally empty. When he got out cautiously and approached the car, armed with the gun from his glove compartment, he found the man gone and the engine quietly idling.

It took Shayne only ten minutes on his car radio telephone to discover that he had inadvertently recovered a vehicle stolen from Miami International Airport . . .

The legwork, demanding, time-consuming, too often fruitless, had begun on this case, as it did on almost all of Shayne's cases. He spent the next two hours checking out the addresses that Stegner had given him as to where Brady Nichols might be. The police also had them, of course, and Shayne didn't expect to have any luck. He

didn't. The trail of Brady Nichols was cold.

He checked with Lucy by phone and she had only a minor report. A verbose, but somewhat incoherent lawyer had called, stated that he represented Pamela Nichols Johnson. He had threatened to sue Mike Shayne Investigations "for persecution by certain rich persons of this city whose names shall be nameless." Exact transcription.

"Is that a crank call, Michael?" she asked.

"No, it's real," he said. "However, Mr. Stanishaw is not exactly a graduate of the Harvard Law School. If I wanted to book you into the Sun and Sardine lounge, to sing for free drinks and bus fare, Stanishaw could help."

He told her about the episode with Pam and her friends that morning.

"Stay away from that woman, Michael," said Lucy. "I have a feeling that she hangs on men and they sink."

"She does and they have," said Shayne. "There are sometimes terrifying aspects to innocence."

Greg Johnson himself answered the door at the Hollis Johnson mansion in Bal Harbour. He wore a grey coordinated outfit that set off his slim body to excellent effect. His face turned angry when he saw it was Shayne.

"I'd like to speak to your step-mother if it's possible," said Shayne.

"It's not possible, Shayne," said the young man. "Not tonight, not tomorrow, not ever. The reporters are with her now, and we've got a funeral to think about. Besides, she spent the day at police headquarters and there've been a million phone calls. She's exhausted."

The circular drive in front of the mansion was filled with commercial cars from the TV stations and the newspapers. Over Johnson's shoulders Shayne could see the bright arc lights of TV recording equipment. He couldn't resist a dig.

"I see she's resting. Perhaps you and I could talk."

Greg's face remained sullen. "I don't think so. No! You're working for that punk Adams and his crowd. You just want to make trouble for us."

"Your father," said Shayne, "was well thought of by a lot of people in this town. He made a good living by helping small companies and small investors beat back the big fellows and saved many a business. In his way, he was an asset to the community and somebody took him down. You, of all people, should be anxious to work with anyone that wants to find the killer."

Once again Shayne met that mercurial twist of emotions that seemed common to both Greg and Pam.

"Oh, I *want* to, Mr. Shayne. You *bet* I want do. But not tonight. Maybe tomorrow. Call me tomorrow." The door slammed in Shayne's face.

Shayne shook his head in annoyance, started to press the buzzer, then turned away with a shrug. Later, perhaps. There was a lot more ground to cover before he needed that interview. His stomach growled now and for a moment he had visions of a thick steak at The Beef House, or even a juicy hamburger at Joe's Diner, but the questions that burned in his head took precedence.

He walked around to the back of the mansion. It was a long walk, through flower beds and an arboretum. Hollis Johnson had built himself a very large house, a structure that looked much like a medieval castle, except that there were colored lights and even pennants hanging from strategic corners on the second and third floors. What was it that one of the millionaires had said in Shayne's office? Splashy. Hollis Johnson had been sharp and he'd been bright and with it went splashy.

There was a light in the chauffeur's quarters over the garage so Shayne found his way up the stone steps, brushing against leafy vines. It made him aware that the twilight had gone. It was night, soft and dark, and, for Shayne, filled with questions whose answers might be equally dark.

IV

WILLIAMS, HOLLIS JOHNSON'S chauffeur, turned out to be a middlesized man with a middle-aged face and brown hair obviously dyed. He looked white and shaken. Shayne identified himself.

"No more questions," said the chauffeur. "The police all day. And reporters. Besides, Mr. Greg said you were probably going to come around and I was not to talk to you."

The phone rang and Williams clutched his head and moved towards it, holding himself carefully. Shayne saw that the chauffeur's quarters were plain but comfortable, probably the apartment of a single man from the way things were strewn about.

Williams wore a formal white shirt but it was open at the collar. On the table were his coat and a bottle of cognac, opened and with a half-filled glass. A black, narrow tie hung on the back of a chair.

Shayne's eyes thinned and he moved into the apartment as Williams handled his phone call.

"Oh, Bonnie. No, no, I'm with someone. . . Yes, maybe later. . . Damn it, there's nothing to worry about. . . No, listen, I'll call you back."

The man hung up, squinted his eyes as if he were in pain, stared at Shayne. "Hennessey and I are old friends," said Shayne. "If you need any help in punishing this

bottle, I have a certain talent . . . ”

Williams smiled wanly. “Why not?” he said. “Screw Greg Johnson.” There was a smoldering savagery behind those disturbed eyes. He got a second glass and he and Shayne sat down at the table.

Shayne told Williams he was puzzled by the murdered man’s movements the night before. Hollis Johnson had set out in his black Cadillac, driven by Williams, about seven o’clock to attend the weekly poker party with his friends, Grimsahw, Adams and Fox. He never reached the club which was the usual meeting place.

A couple of hours later, he was dead on a park bench, with his head bashed in. Williams was at a small bar more than a mile away. The Caddy was found about midnight on a residential street three miles in the opposite direction from the park and the bar. Williams had stayed at Topp’s bar all evening, drinking.

“Like I told the cops, on those nights when Mr. Hollis went to his poker game, we always stopped. I’d go into Topp’s and hoist a couple, while he took the car for about an hour.”

“To go where?” asked Shayne.

Williams managed to look amused and embarrassed at the same time. “He sneaked over on Bayliss Road to see an astrologer. Every night he played cards he did that. Wanted to know how

good his luck would be that night.

“If the astrologer thought he was hot, he’d spend big and risk a lot. If it was his cold night, he’d play his cards tight. But he didn’t want anyone to know that he was hooked on star-gazing. So many people laugh at that.”

“Who was this astrologer.”

Williams shook his head. “it may sound funny, but I -don’t know. With Mr. Hollis, you only found out what he wanted you to know. I went over this with the cops really digging in my head, but he never dropped a word about who it was or where the astrologer’s digs were. He’d drop me off at Topp’s, disappear for an hour, come back, and then I’d take him on to his game.”

More bizarre stuff — too bizarre. Mike Shayne sipped his Hennessey and studied Williams.

“Last night, Mr. Hollis just didn’t come back,” Williams went on. “I had my usual two, and then three and pretty soon I had a snootful. There were about thirty people, maybe more, saw me there all evening. I guess it was midnight when a guy I know, a Topp’s regular, gave me a ride back here. That’s the first I knew about the murder.”

“Nobody implicates you.” Shayne got up and walked to the open window and stared out into the black night. Trees swayed in the breeze, patterns of light from the mansion danced on well-kept lawns.

With his back to Williams, Shayne said, "Hollis was so sensitive about not being spotted going to this astrologer that he disguised himself as his own chauffeur. I figure he had a chauffeur's coat and visor cap in the trunk of your Caddy. And a black tie, of course."

Williams gasped. "How did you know that?"

"That tie that hangs on your chair. Just like the one Hollis wore when he was found. The chauffeur's cap and coat are missing. So are his own."

"Listen," said Williams in excited protest, "Mr. Hollis had his peculiar ways but I don't think—"

Shayne came down hard. "Come on, Williams. That's bull about the astrologer. Hollis never went to any astrologer. You know it. He had a woman, didn't he? On his poker nights out, he stopped off to see a woman somewhere. That's why he needed the chauffeur disguise."

"Jesus!" Williams sucked in his breath. "I can't believe that. Why, he was married to this Pam, a beautiful young wife."

"That's what's stopped the police so far, Williams," said Shayne drifting back to the table and sitting to swing his feet up for comfort.

Williams gulped his liquor, a nervous, cornered look on his face.

"What do you mean, Shayne?"

"All the publicity about the White Satin Widow, the young wife, the rest. For a couple of days the police will roust quite a few astrologers before they realize what really went on. But they'll find that out and be back to you."

"As soon as they figure out that Hollis disguised himself as a chauffeur, they'll know it wasn't to conceal anything as innocent as a visit to an astrologer. Too many people play the astrologer game today. But visiting a woman — a whore..." Shayne let it hang.

Williams was on his feet in agitation. "Damn it, Shayne, I don't know anything about *that!*"

"Steady, Williams. Of course you do. He couldn't have played his game with coats, hats and ties without your knowing. But, of course, you had to keep it secret from Greg and Pam — and now the world at large. Well, it has to come out."

"I don't know anything about a woman and Mr. Hollis!" Williams insisted. His face was very white now.

Shayne took his shot in the dark. "It could be someone named 'Bonnie'."

"Get out!" cried Williams. "Get the hell out of my apartment, Shayne." In his agitation the man swung around and started for the phone. "I'm going to call Mr. Greg and tell him you're out here bothering —"

He was opposite the open window, a perfect target in the rectangle of light. There were two deadly hisses and Williams stopped cold. He swung around to face Shayne, hands on his chest. Red blood spurted from between his fingers.

"Why, I think I've been shot —" he said in surprise. Then he pitched to the floor.

Shayne was at the window in a flash and saw a shadow slithering down the big tree just outside. He spun back to take a quick look at the chauffeur. The man twitched once, coughed, and was gone.

Regretting that he hadn't brought his gun, Shayne ran to the door and down the steps, but the darkness of the stairs and the twisting vines slowed him. By the time he reached ground level, his man had rounded the corner of the mansion.

Shayne went top speed for the corner of the building and the driveway in front of the house. His killer had help. A strange car sat in front of Shayne's Buick in the circular drive. The figure leaped in and the car roared off.

Shayne hit his Buick and revved it up, taking off after the other car with a shriek of tires. His luck ran out where the private drive connected with the street. The killer's car made the turn all right, barely in front of still another commercial station wagon bringing still another news crew to interview the White Satin Widow.

Shayne had to stand on the brakes and sit there, cursing, while the big station wagon maneuvered to let him out, its occupants staring at him open-mouthed. By the time Shayne got past it, his quarry was gone. The street was empty...

Shayne made the call to the police from Williams' apartment, then looked around while he waited, conscious of the unmoving figure on the floor. There was absolutely nothing he could do for Hollis Johnson's chauffeur at this point.

The phone rang. Shayne stared at it a moment, then picked it up.

"Yes."

The voice was feminine and sounded troubled. "Excuse me. I must have a wrong number."

Shayne thought fast. "Wait, Bonnie — you don't have a wrong number. Listen, Williams is in trouble. This is Mike Shayne, a private detective, and I have to talk to you."

"Detective. Oh, no!" gasped the woman.

"A *private* detective, Bonnie. I can help you. Williams is dead, and it's very important that I see you. Let me have your —"

The phone reverted to a dial tone. Mike Shayne hung it up slowly. *Damn!* He had to get hold of that woman. But he couldn't find anything on her, no phone number, no address, in the time he had to search before the police arrived.

Soon the murder circus began again. Shayne told his story and gave the Homicide officer in charge the essence of his interview and told them about Bonnie, as officials swarmed over the apartment.

"You'd better come in to headquarters with us, Mr. Shayne," said the officer.

Shayne would much rather have stayed to see Greg and Pam's faces when they learned about the murder of the chauffeur. Or, failing that, to wrap his teeth around a big, fat hamburger. Instead, he dutifully rolled down to police headquarters to make his statement...

It was a weary private detective who finally returned to his own apartment. Two days of the case and two murders. Shayne was past the point of first hunger and had decided to make a sandwich and fall into bed. Either he would sleep or he'd stay awake pondering all the aspects of the White Satin Widow Kill and either way he stood to gain. But his day wasn't over yet.

Curled up, all alone, in front of his door was...Pamela Nichols Johnson. She dozed.

"You might as well come in," he sighed, waking her up.

V

SHE WAS ALERT ENOUGH when they got inside. She was

more simply dressed than this morning. She wore old jeans and a plain sweater. But of course there was a satin kerchief at her throat.

"I just couldn't take it any more, Mr. Shayne," she said, wide blue eyes filled with misery. "The police. The press all day long. And then that terrible thing that happened to Williams and more police and more reporters."

"It's a big case," murmured Shayne. He tossed his hat on the rack and moved to his easy chair next to the table. Pam sat at his feet on the hassock.

"What can I do for you?" said Shayne.

She stared up at him like a puppy trying to please a master.

"Why, I thought you might help me hide out for a few days. Except for the funeral for Hollis, I want to stay out of public view."

He looked at her closely. Another sudden switch. She had liked the public view up until now.

"There's Brady still running around," she said. "There's Greg, and he's turning into a drag. Hollis' house depresses me."

"You know I'm working for Adams and his group."

She made a face. "Oh, I'm not mad at them. They can think what they want. I didn't have anything to do with poor Hollis' death. I loved him. I will always love him. He always told me not to feel sad if anything happened. He said he was old and ready to go at any time."

"How'd you first meet him?"

"It was Greg. I've always liked music — to sing and to dance. Greg likes to dance. I met him at a disco and we'd dance. Nothing heavy. I didn't want that. Greg's never tried to touch me, like most men, and I liked that. Then I met his father and he — we — I — it got heavy."

"Maybe you should have your lawyer find a place for you to hole up." Shayne was on the prowl again, this time to the liquor cabinet. He got himself a cognac with ice water from the kitchenette and poured Pam a brandy as they talked.

"Oh, you can't trust Bill." She laughed. "If I turned myself over to him, I'd not only have reporters all over me, but he'd be trying to sell my life story to somebody. Show biz, you know."

"I can guess," said Shayne. He kept throwing questions at the girl to see if she knew anything about last night, anything from her past or Hollis' that hadn't already come out. She followed him from room to room. He had little luck with that. In the kitchenette, cognac beside him Shayne laid out the makings of an omelette.

"What about Williams." He questioned her closely for a few minutes, but Pam seemed to know nothing about Williams or anyone called "Bonnie". Shayne didn't have the heart to tell her his suspicions about Hollis' lost hours on those poker game nights. It

was evident that Williams was Hollis' man. He seldom drove Pam or had much contact with her.

"I'd either be with Hollis, or I'd be dancing with Greg. Hollis liked us to go out together. Hollis didn't care for music or dancing, and he knew it made me happy."

That line was clear. Hollis' young wife was a bedmate and a decoration. At other times it was out of sight, out of mind.

"What about Greg and his father. Did they fight?"

Pam wrinkled her nose, standing alongside Shayne at the stove, watching the omelette take shape.

"Oh, they fought. Greg's artistic. Wears clothes and plays tennis a lot. Hollis was always for business. Mr. Shayne, let me finish cooking your eggs. I can make toast, too."

Her arm went around his waist to give him a quick hug in her innocently wanton way. Shayne almost dropped his spatula, but her blue eyes were unclouded by desire.

"Young lady, I am perfectly capable of —"

"Oh, I know, I know. Some people in this world can do anything, and you're one of them. But I don't get much chance to cook or do anything for people, married to Hollis. When I was a singer and before I met Brady, I could do lots of things. It'd be such fun to make your omelette!"

Shayne gently disengaged himself. He was aware that there

was a type of good-looking young woman who appreciated men that kept their hands to themselves... Men who gave them a chance to be more than decorations. He shrugged and turned the eggs over to Pam, busying himself with the tea-pot for coffee water and the dripulator.

She served up his food, chattering happily, and Shayne thanked her and ate with relish. She left him alone, moving about the apartment while he stared moodily out of the window and tried to integrate the information he had.

There were now two main lines of inquiry. The murdered man's movements last night and the business about Williams and the mysterious Bonnie. That looked like the hot trail.

The other, the cold trail, was Brady Nichols. And the person who could tell him the most about that was Pam herself. Maybe it would be better to turn Pam over to Lucy tonight, at her place or a motel. Tomorrow he could examine the blonde in depth about her ex-husband and Hollis.

Then there was the peripheral business of Nichols' garage, Stegner and the odd incident with the silver Mercedes. Pam had thrown him a surprise on that. When he asked her where Greg was, she had told him young Johnson had gone somewhere with a broad-faced man who wore a pork-pie hat. Shayne immediately thought of the man he had

followed in the Mercedes.

"He was a crude type," Pam said as she turned the omelette. "But Greg doesn't always have good sense about people."

Finished with his food, Shayne lit a cigaret and prepared himself a *cafe royale*. So deep was he in his thoughts that it was some time before he realized he no longer heard Pam's chatter. She wasn't in the living room. Puzzled, he looked in the kitchenette, but she wasn't there. And the bathroom was dark, the door open.

He opened the door and looked out into the hall. No trace of Pam or anyone else out there. He went to his bedroom and stuck his head in the door. The first sight that met his eyes was a tumble of female clothes on the chair by his bed. The second thing was her white arms and shoulders as she nestled under the covers. She smoked a cigaret and smiled sleepily at him.

"Are you coming to bed now?" she asked.

Shayne almost dropped his *cafe royale*. There was little if any doubt that Pamela was nude under his covers.

"Young lady, I didn't invite you —" he began.

"It's all right, Mr. Shayne. You saved my life. You're helping find the dreadful man that killed Hollis. Brady wouldn't dare come after me while you're around."

She wiggled her toes under the covers and then reached over to

his ashtray to knock the ashes from her cigaret. One bare, feminine breast was completely exposed to his gaze. She sighed happily, staring at him dreamily. One Pamela Nichols Johnson was totally available.

Shayne was not made of metal. "Now, look here, Pam —" he began and was aware that he blushed. Possibly there were better bosoms somewhere in Miami, but he hadn't seen any lately.

"I'm not quite ready for this," he said and left the bedroom. As he crossed the living room rug, he was aware that his pulse was fast and that certain juices flowed. He picked up the phone and dialed Lucy. She answered sleepily after several rings.

"I have a problem, Lucy," he said. "At the moment there is one totally nude young woman in my bed, Pamela Johnson."

He heard Lucy gasp and then her enraged stutter. Wickedly, he let her simmer for a few moments.

"I'll get dressed right away and fly over there, Michael," she said, panic in her voice, after she had recovered.

"No need of that."

"What do you mean."

"I'm going to leave her here."

"Michael!"

"I'm only five minutes away," Shayne said. "I thought I'd come over to your place. You could make up the sofa for me, or something."

Lucy gave a relieved laugh. "You come over, Michael — right away. We can discuss my sofa later."

The next day Shayne found himself stymied as far as his desire to question Pam and Greg Johnson was concerned. Hollis Johnson was to be buried and Shayne suggested Lucy stay with Pam to help her through the ordeal.

Lucy was agreeable and Shayne found himself musing on how women who liked the same man often liked each other. It was probably self administered ego strokes, but there it was — Lucy's love for him was beyond question and little Pam had somehow fallen into the detective's orbit.

Shayne called Stegner at the Nichols' garage, but the manager had nothing further for him on Brady — no calls, no letters, no contacts, no new ideas on where the young Irishman could be found. The detective checked Stegner on the episode of the man who had knocked down the Cuban, the man who had fled in the stolen car. Stegner laughed and told him that he was sure the garage had worked on many a stolen car without knowing it.

"Miami and the Beach are loaded with Caddies, Lincolns, Mercedes, and the rest of the high-bracket cars," Stegner said. "They get pulled all the time. My man spilled a soft drink on the

loudmouth — I heard all about it afterwards."

After the call, something registered in the back of Shayne's mind, but he couldn't pull it out.

Next, Shayne put in a call to Len Sturgis, chief of Gentry's detectives, to find out what he might pick up on the Williams killing.

There was nothing Sturgis could tell him. The killer who climbed the tree and shot Williams through the window could have come from the mansion, where there was a great deal of confusion, or it could have been Brady Nichols, although there was no known link, or it could have been some outsider.

As for Bonnie, the Department hadn't run her down yet. Vice was checking on Bonnies through street contacts but it was pretty tenuous to tie one of these Bonnies to the Johnson chauffeur.

After that, Shayne talked briefly to Adams, representing his clients. The man was upset about the killing of the chauffeur.

"I know you won't like to hear me say this, Shayne," said Adams, "but we all think it will come back to those high-living, irresponsible kids. Hollis made a terrible mistake when he took that blonde into his life."

Shayne made an appointment to talk to Adams and the others about Hollis' general business background. He had to crack the mystery of Hollis putting money into the Nichols garage — a failing

business and owned by a man who hated him. Of course, Hollis had made a career of snatching failing businesses from the jaws of bankruptcy, but this one didn't make sense.

Adams and company were also off to the Hollis Johnson funeral, so Shayne drove down to Police Headquarters to check in with his old friend, Will Gentry, the Chief.

VI

WILL GENTRY SAT behind the big desk in his private office, stolid, beefy, one pudgy hand holding an unlit cigar as he looked up from the litter of papers before him.

"The White Satin business?" asked Shayne, sliding into a chair.

"Hell — green, orange, black satin," said Gentry, "The TV networks ought to pay the City of Miami and the Police Department for providing the highest rated TV show of the season. You can't escape this damn thing. Never thought I'd look forward to watching commercials, but it's got to that. I hear you're sitting on Pam Johnson."

"She wanted a buffer and her husband's friends don't like her very much."

Gentry jabbed his cigar at Shayne. "Mike, when I want that woman, you whip her right over to me."

"Cool it, Will," said Shayne. "I don't obstruct justice."

"Cool it, Will," Gentry mimicked. "Shayne, I don't know what's come over you — going to discos, getting your secretary shot, mixing with white satin widows!"

"You know what's up, Will," Shayne answered. "Beneath all this window dressing, there's something very strange going on. We'll all have to dig till it's out."

Amenities over, the two old friends compared notes. Gentry still pushed the Nichols angle strongly. After all, he had the man on an assault-with-intent-to-kill charge and still considered him dangerous.

"That doesn't mean I like him for the murders," Gentry added. It appears to me that the old man and Nichols had a ball playing games with each other — till it got too rough."

Gentry told Shayne that he also had a cold eye cocked on young Greg Johnson. It appeared that the young man was neck-deep in gambling debts and his father wouldn't pay them. Greg lived on a tight allowance from Hollis and had to walk a narrow line even to get that.

It was possible, he felt, that the blonde and Greg arranged Hollis' death so they could "dive into the money box and bathe in dollar bills," as Gentry vividly expressed it. The chief was bothered by the Greg-Pam angle, too. Old man with young wife and young son on the premises.

Shayne set him straight on that.

"They're more like a brother and sister, Will. They don't relate deeply to other people, and the last thing they'd want would be a heavy trip."

"Heavy trip?" asked Gentry. "Are you going hippie, Shayne?"

Shayne smiled. "Will, you've got to keep an ear on the youngsters' talk or your department will end up hiring translators."

Then they discussed briefly Shayne's spotting the stolen Mercedes. Gentry buzzed his secretary, who brought in a sheaf of pictures.

"Had the ID boys run through some mugs based on your description," said Gentry. "See if any of these look familiar."

The man in the porkpie hat was the third photo Shayne picked up. Gentry looked at the attached sheet, which stated him to be a Chicago character known as "Harry the Shuttle." A car thief, a "puller" in the jargon. He had been spotted recently in Miami.

"Not surprising," said Gentry. "Grand larceny, auto theft, is way up. The odd thing is, we're not getting the recoveries we got a year ago. Six months ago, even. We're looking into that. But I don't see it tying into this white satin idiocy, except for Harry the Shuttle showing up at Nichols garage. The garage is clean. We've got nothing on Stegner or any of those people."

Shayne never lied to the Chief. At the same time he was glad that Gentry didn't ask directly if Shayne sensed any connection. He was sitting on the knowledge that Greg knew Harry the Shuttle, according to Pam. He intended to run that one right down the rabbit hole.

The redhead asked, "What about Johnson's car, his Cadillac. Any chance that was stolen?"

"No way, Mike. It was sitting empty, keys inside, some distance from Flamingo Park. Any kid could've jumped in and wheeled it off. We do know Hollis wasn't killed in it. We've got it in impound and the boys shook it down good."

"No clothes, hats, coats?"

Gentry shook his head. "When we find that prostitute's place, we'll find Hollis's own coat and hat and his chauffeur's disguise. That's where he got it."

Shayne agreed and on that note he left Gentry's office. As he reached the street, he got a sudden hunch — one of those instincts that separates a journeyman investigator from a true pro. He jumped in his car and drove to the poorer section, where he found Topp's bar. It was the place where Hollis had dropped off Williams when he visited Bonnie — where Williams had spent the entire evening while Hollis was off being murdered.

It was a typical lower class bar, with a fuzzy neon sign in the

window, flickering even in the sun, a card announcing low rates for beer on Friday nights, dirty plate-glass windows and an ancient sign displaying a top hat with cocktail glass superimposed.

Inside, a half dozen customers toyed with their beers on cheap whiskies. Shayne made a pal of Hodges, the bartender, simply by ordering Martell. This man, with his big stomach, round red face, was more than glad to discuss Williams and bask in the peripheral fame of the White Satin case. Williams was well-known here and his death made the case personal to the publican.

"Actually," said Shayne, "I only met the man once. He told me he could set me up with a broad. I was all set for fun and games and then the so-and-so ends up dead before he can make the set-up."

Hodges nodded soberly as if he fully understood the problem. Man wants a broad, man depends on friend to clear him with a hot number, friend gets killed before contact is made.

"Well, Williams was no pimp," said Hodges. "I don't know who he had in mind."

"He mentioned a 'Bonnie'."

"Listen, Mister, names don't mean anything to hookers. You ought to know that. 'It's Jane today to this John and Ruth to that John tomorrow. Most of them has a half dozen names."

Shayne dropped a ten dollar

bill on the bar. "Still, I'd sure like to meet that broad, whoever she was."

Hodges looked at the bill and frowned in deep thought. It was obvious he was trying. Then a light broke over his face.

"Say, - it could've been May Truitt. She used to hook, but quit. Matter of fact, Williams met her here, as I remember. But she don't hook, not for a long time."

"I wonder if you'd know —"

"Easy, Mister. Three blocks down, third floor apartment. May Truitt. Place called the 'Bay Breezes', because it isn't on the bay and it don't get breezes. She still comes in once in a while."

Hodges flicked up the bill as if it were attached to a rubber band in his hand.

"Mister, you might get the door slammed in your face. Appreciate it, if you don't mention who sent you."

"Your name is forever safe and my lips are sealed," breathed the redhead, sliding off the barstool. He hated to desert a perfectly good brandy, but he felt he was getting warm. *Bonnie May* was a popular name in lots and lots of families and he was three blocks away from what could be the pivotal person in the whole case.

The Bay Breezes was an unexpectedly well groomed four-story apartment building, older, but a well thumb in that run-down neighborhood. It offered the usual row of mailboxes with tenants

names and Shayne felt elation when he saw that of *Bonnie May Truitt*. The word *Bonnie* was defaced, almost scratched out. Her apartment was 310 and Shayne bounded up the stairs, not wanting to wait for what appeared to be a staid, slow-moving elevator.

He stopped in the hall and moved his .45 from his shoulder rig to his belt. Already he sensed a tension, a danger. The apartment doors were all closed, except one. There was no one in the hall. The yellow carpet offered no clue as to the tenants. The one apartment with its door slightly ajar was — 310.

Silent as a cat, gun in hand now, Shayne eased to the door and pressed it open wide, standing back in case a bullet, knife or hurtling body assailed him.

The door swung slowly wide, revealing an entranceway with a gray throw rug, an expanse of living room leading to a big window that overlooked the street. He could see a sofa, a TV, part of a chair with some woman's clothes on its back.

He rapped on the open door. "Anybody home? Miss Truitt — I'd like to speak to you."

Silence

The detective moved into the room, gun at the ready. Doors on the left, doors on the right. A comfortably furnished place — *Bonnie May* wouldn't be labeled poor, even if the neighborhood was. He called again and again

and there was no answer.

Then he stopped short. Tossed over the back of the chair were clothes that held special meaning for him, very special. A chauffeur's black uniform coat, a chauffeur's cap set on top of it. Under this another coat and, on the seat of the chair, a hat. The second coat and hat looked expensive. Even before Shayne picked them up and looked inside he knew they had belonged to Hollis Johnson. It was bingo this time, all the way.

But why was the clothing set out like this, almost as if waiting for a cleaner to come and pick it up. And why was the door ajar? The doors to his right led respectively to a fair-sized kitchen, empty and clean, and a comfortable bedroom, also empty and clean, with the bed made. The bedspread was garish, bright red and orange, a sensual invitation if one relished the obvious.

Shayne moved across the living room again. One door led to the darkened interior of what appeared to be a sewing room, also empty, also neat. The last door led to the bathroom. It, too, was slightly ajar.

The redhead heard a sound and the hairs on the back of his neck prickled. He had heard that click enough times before, the sound of a revolver being cocked. Someone inside the bathroom held a gun on the door and was ready to shoot.

"Miss Truit," he called. "I'm

a friend of *Williams*. Take it easy. Don't shoot."

For a moment — silence. Then another strange sound, one that he couldn't place this time. It was a human sound. Shayne hesitated for a long moment. Only a fool would plunge into a room when he knew a loaded gun awaited him. But there was no place to stand out of the line of fire, no choice but to go in.

Mike Shayne went in. He went in low, wishing he had wings so he could have flown in high.

VII

A RED-HEADED WOMAN stood backed to the tile wall, holding a revolver in front of her with both hands. It was at least a .38 and it trembled in the intensity of her grasp. Her eyes were glazed with fright. Her face was a mask of fear.

She fired just as Shayne shouted 'No! There was a flash and a roar and the bathroom door splintered and plaster jumped from the wall behind. The slug went well over Shayne's head. He sprang at Bonnie May Truit and relieved her of the gun.

The loud sound of the shot in this enclosed space temporarily deafened both of them, but Shayne was quickly able to identify the last strange sound he had heard before his charge. It was nervous breathing, an animal panting of extreme terror. He had

never seen anyone more frightened in his life. Bonnie May fainted in his arms as he took the gun away from her.

He carried her into her bedroom and revived her. Blue eyes stared blearily at him, and then again rank fear leaped into full flame.

She sat up and cried, "He didn't die here! I swear it! You can take his things."

"Now, Bonnie —"

But she was moaning whipping her body back and forth. "He looked out of the window. He saw something. He went out. That's all I know."

The woman grabbed his arm, her eyes wide with terror. "He didn't die here, so you don't have to kill me. Understand? He didn't die here!"

Shayne tugged at his left earlobe. Bonnie May Truit was beyond the point at which a good stiff slap would bring her out of her hysterics. She was far past the point of coherence. He worked with her for fifteen minutes but her hysteria bordered on the psychotic.

Drug-induced? He didn't think so. Terrorized by the killer of Hollis and Williams? Again, no. That person would simply shoot.

Shayne put in calls to both the police and the county, and the last he saw of her, almost two hours later, she was being gently led to an ambulance that would take her to a hospital psychiatric ward for tranquilization.

She still insisted, "He didn't die here. You can have his clothes." And she still lapsed into the panic-breathing sessions.

"Will she come out of this?" Shayne asked the attendant.

"Probably. Might take a day or so. She's wound up so tight right now that we're just shadows to her, in a world that hardly exists for her. Shock plus fear, plus probably a long history of living on the edge of high tension. We'll tranquilize her and sleep her and see. I wouldn't count on getting much sense out of her for a couple of days, Mr. Shayne."

So much for Shayne's pivotal figure in the case. She might as well be dead for all the information she could provide just now. Poor soul! He hoped they'd manage to bring her down easy.

He made a couple of test inquiries without results. It was the kind of neighborhood where everybody minded his or her own business and offered no voluntary information. Which meant that Hollis could have been killed right on the sidewalk and nobody would have interfered or reported it. It was supposition that fitted the facts.

Hollis had been in that third-story apartment, either while getting undressed or getting dressed. Then he had looked out the window and seen something down on the street that sent him flying down the stairs in his shirt-sleeves. Say, someone getting into

his Caddy. Someone like Harry the Shuttle?

The redhead drove slowly out of the neighborhood on the way back to his office. The funeral was over and Greg and Pam were the next stop on his list. As he moved the Buick along, he had sudden recollection of Bonnie's face.

The woman had been quite pretty. Under such stress with her face distorted, it hadn't been obvious, but, yes — she had the looks to hold onto the millionaire, probably at a profit. She wouldn't be the first hooker to quit while she was ahead and line up something like Hollis. Not every one ended up in the gutter contrary to popular moralistic belief.

Shayne came to a stoplight and braked, his mind computing, figuring, integrating. A car slid up alongside his.

"This is a warning, shamus. Get out of the Johnson case!"

Shayne swiveled his head and saw a familiar face — the man in the porkpie hat, Harry the Shuttle. Harry pointed a gun at Shayne and fired. The bullet went right under Shayne's nose and through the open window of the buick on the other side to chip a lamppost. Then, with a squeal of rubber, Harry took off as the light changed.

Boiling anger seized the detective as he tromped on his own accelerator and took off after the flying Harry. Harry skidded around the first corner on two

wheels, but Shayne stayed right with him. He didn't know what he would do when he caught up to Harry, but he didn't take to being shot at, especially by a hood of such low calibre. He was not going to let the Chicago car-puller escape him this time.

Straightaway for three blocks Harry narrowly missed a car that poked its nose out from a side street. Shayne went behind the startled motorist with a flip of the steering wheel and hung right on Harry's tail.

He was almost even with the grey car Harry was driving. Ahead was a near-empty street with no pedestrians and few cars parked at the curb. On that flat-out run Shayne knew he could take Harry and send him over the curb, pull him down. He revved up . . .

Right on Harry's bumper, Shayne, was close enough to see through Harry's car, to see the man's face in his rear-view mirror. Harry looked very nervous.

"That's right, friend," said Mike Shayne. "Get ready for your next interview. Then the police station and a nice cold cell."

Then Harry did a foolish thing. It was probably caused by his terror of the big Irish private detective. He made a sudden swing into a sidestreet much too fast to satisfy the laws of gravity. His car spun out, hit the curb, turned over lazily once in the air, then came down on a low cement wall

in front of a private citizen's house. The crash was tremendous, a muffled roar and a scream of tortured metal that resounded for blocks.

Shayne had shot past the corner, aware that the turn could not be made by any car traveling at such high speeds. He slowed, backed up and stopped, then ran over to the wreck. The impact had snapped Harry's neck and there he sat, head at an awry angle, grinning at Shayne in death. The revolver he'd used to warn Shayne still sat on the seat beside him.

So, on the third day of the White Satin Widow case, there were three dead, plus one in the madhouse.

This time, after the police had come and gone, Shayne called Tim at the *Miami News*.

"I need a rundown on a Chicago car thief called Harry the Shuttle," Shayne told him. "Have you got a little time?"

"For you, my friend, all the time in the world," said Tim. "The city desk just caught on to the fact that you're hiding out Pamela Johnson. I was just about to come hunting for you."

"Good," said Shayne. "Get your stuff on the Chicago man and meet me at The Beef House tonight. Maybe we can have dinner on the *News* this time, because everything that's going on fits into your story."

After that, the redhead had his interview with Greg Johnson but

the young man proved a disappointment.

"I don't know this Chicago man. He had a letter of introduction from a Chicago auto salvage yard and he wanted to meet Adams." Greg added, "That's your client, Shayne. He couldn't get through to Adams, so he looked me up. Dad had money in Adams' salvage yard. But I got rid of the man as soon as possible. He was repulsive. Not only did he use bad grammar, but when I suggested a game of tennis he looked at me as if I were crazy."

Shayne had to smile at that. In Greg's world there were people who danced in discos and played tennis, and outside there was the great unwashed.

Tim Rourke was really revved up when the detective met him that night at The Beef House. His black eyes glowed in their deep sockets, his lanky figure almost quivered with energy.

"I've got a lot to spill to you, Shayne," he said. "You eat and I'll talk. I'll catch up with you later."

Mike ordered his steak and while he mangled his salad Tim opened up.

"First of all, I know a character in Chicago who takes his vacation down here every winter. His name's Renfrew — maybe you've met him. Anyway, as soon as I sprung the name Harold Caster, alias Harry the Shuttle, the guy opened up with a flood of infor-

mation. Harry worked for various garages in Chicago they call 'chop shops'."

Shayne paused with his fork frozen in his salad.

"Ah-huh! Seems to me I read something about that in the papers a while back. Chicago was the big center for cutting up cars and selling the parts."

"Right on," said Tim. "It's gotten to be big business, according to Renfrew. Mostly it deals with expensive cars. They make so many models these days that replacement parts are hard to find. And repairs cost big money. A chop shop can take a ten grand Cadillac and sell the parts for twenty gees. And that's pure profit, my son, because remember the stolen Caddy didn't cost the chop-shop anything."

He waved a bony finger at Shayne. "Mind you, they sell mostly parts that don't have any identity numbers — stuff like doors and rear and front ends. A good crew can pick a stolen car clean in two hours, and who can prove anything?"

"The engines and transmissions, the stuff with identity numbers, are shipped to some distant point, the numbers filed off and sold for more money. But that isn't the real target of these people."

"Renfrew says that ten years ago ninety percent of all the cars stolen in this country were recovered. By the latest statistics, only about seventy percent get

recovered today. No increase in totals stolen either — it's still about a million, a little less."

So our friend Harry the Shuttle spotted and stole cars for these places," nodded Shayne.

"Right. Car-pulling is a regular profession. These guys pull down about two bills per hit and they do four or five a week. They can steal a car, without keys, in about fifty seconds. Some of them even carry around books for future steals, with the model and year, the color and where the car's usually parked.

"Now here's the part where you'll prick up your ears. These guys who pull cars don't know where they're going. They don't even want to know. When they get a 'pull sheet', they steal the car and leave it on some public street. At that point the spotter from the chop shop takes over and keeps an eye on it. Once a spotter's sure nobody's discovered it, no cops will come around, he runs it into the chop shop."

VIII

SHAYNE'S STEAK had arrived and he had taken one bite. Now he stopped and a flash of understanding froze his face.

"My God! Hollis Johnson's car had to be stolen for a chop shop. That's why it sat there, calmly and openly on the street with nobody around. Tim — you see what that means? It changes

the whole case around.

"Everybody's looking for motives and background on *why* Hollis was killed. Big as that is, *his murder was incidental!* He happened to see the car thief trying to take his car. So the guy hit him and that was that. It was probably Harry the Shuttle. He eas mean and he hit hard. I saw him attack a man at Nichols' garage."

Tim picked it up. "So Harry has a body on his hands, which he drops in the Caddy, as is, without coat or hat, and runs it to the park and plants it on a park bench. Then he calmly delivers the Caddy to the drop-off point like he's supposed to and goes about his slimy business."

"But since Hollis's body gets found pretty quickly," Shayne went on, "the police are alerted for the car and they get to it before the chop shippers do."

"By Jove, I believe you've got it, Shayne."

Tim's steak arrived and the two men sat and ate in silence for a while.

"Thanks, Tim," said Shayne after a while. "That's a real break on the case. But there's something more to it. The nickels that somebody put in Hollis's hand. Harry wouldn't have done that."

"Which means?"

Shayne's eyes stared off in space and his left hand tugged at his earlobe. "Somebody either told Harry to do it — no, not that.

Somebody was with Harry, somebody local, somebody that wanted Brady Nichols tagged for murder."

Then Shayne smiled and his voice went low with his next insight. "You know, Tim, it fits best if Hollis knew the guy with Harry. Hollis wouldn't know Harry, but he knew the other man. So Hollis *had* to be killed when he interrupted that car theft."

"So you've still got a murder case with a personal angle, Shayne."

"Maybe more so. A whole new type of crime operating in our city and the people in it tie in with Hollis somehow. What else can you give me on these chop shops?"

"The other interesting thing is the way the salvage yards work. A while back it paid these yards across the country to hook up by Wats lines. Perfectly legitimate. A dealer in St. Louis has a need for a part and a dealer in Omaha or Chicago has the part, so a deal is made. Nothing wrong with that, because the part's legitimately in stock."

"But with this new chop shop thing, it gets raw. Maybe nobody's got the part wanted, so the salvager tells the chop shop, the chop shop tells the car-puller and the thief grabs a car for that particular part. The car-theft business runs about two billion a year, according to Renfrew, and this is

a bigger and bigger part of it."

"Pretty sad stuff," said Shayne. "Insurance rates go up where stolen cars don't get recovered. It hits everybody. And now this new racket's getting started here."

"Plenty of big, expensive cars in Miami," said Tim giving his head a lugubrious shake. "They are talking about state and maybe even national laws — talking about stamping numbers on every part of the car. But I dunno . . ."

"Will Gentry mentioned that the recovery rate on Grand Larceny, Auto Theft, had gone down," said Shayne. "Now we know why."

The two men finished their meal in quiet conversation about the White Satin Widow case. Tim thought he might want to interview Pam Johnson again and asked Shayne what he thought.

"That's okay. She likes attention. In fact, that's where Brady Nichols went wrong. He thought she wanted to be a star singer, and he kept pushing her, when all she really seems to want is attention. I'll find out from Lucy if Pam wants to go another round."

"She's a must for the front page and it sells papers," said Tim.

"And one Tim Rourke loves blondes," Shayne kidded him.

But when Shayne called Lucy there was bad news.

"She's gone, Michael! She got a phone call a couple of hours ago and got all flustered, and the next

thing I know she took off."

Shayne whistled. "Brady Nichols!"

Lucy was of the same opinion. She worried that Nichols might have lured the girl somewhere to do her harm. Lucy could be like a mother hen when it came to people she liked.

"You could be right, Angel," said Shayne gloomily. "The last time Brady saw her, he tried to put a bullet in her. I'll get right on it."

But, driving away from The Beef House after taking leave of Tim, Shayne felt stymied. There was no clue as to where Brady planned to meet his ex-wife. The detective stopped by Nichols' garage to talk to Stegner, who was just finishing up after a long, hard day. Stegner listened with an impassive face to Shayne's suggestion that Brady had lured Pam to meet him somewhere.

"Have you got anything at all?" asked Shayne. "Anything that didn't come up before?"

Stegner thought for a long moment. "There's one thing I didn't mention before. I never told the police, either, because I didn't think it was concrete enough to matter. Before things got so hectic, Brady used to take a few days off once in a while and run down to the Keys. I don't know which one. That's all I can tell you."

The detective had to be satisfied with that. He wouldn't be able to

help Pam, and he was sorry, because he'd taken a liking — a wary liking — to the little blonde. He just hoped the next day wouldn't bring another killing into the case — the death of Pamela herself.

Several hours later, Shayne found himself in an interesting position. With no other immediate leads to follow, he had settled on Greg Johnson. Direct interviews didn't seem to work with the clothes-horse tennis player, so Shayne decided to tail him. The restless young man left the Johnson mansion shortly after Shayne staked it out and began to hit some of the better bars in Miami. In each of these places, he had a drink with other young men who looked similar to his breed — well-dressed, well-off, sometimes with an attractive woman in tow, sometimes not. It was all very casual.

Then Shayne became aware that he in turn was being followed. His tail was a dark complected man, possibly Cuban, with round shoulders and a hat pulled well over his eyes. By the time Greg, followed by Shayne, had hit the third bar, there was no doubt about it.

The redhead was intrigued. He didn't know what the game was but at this stage of his investigation he was ready to try whatever showed up. So he followed Greg into the fourth bar, relaxed, even amused, to see what was

going to happen next.

Mike Shayne ordered a drink at the bar and collected his change. No sooner had he lifted his brandy than a dark hand slapped on the bar in front of him. The hand was removed. A single nickel sat there before him.

The detective turned slowly and, for a moment, peered into the dark, shifty eyes. Then the round-shouldered man turned and deliberately strolled out of the bar.

"You got me interested," Shayne murmured. He knocked back his brandy, and took a look at Greg. Nothing. Greg chatted with another young man at a table. Shayne decided the man in the overcoat was the action tonight.

His pulse began to pick up when he reached his car. Not twenty feet away sat a grey Ford, its engine idling. It was occupied by the round-shouldered man. the most interesting part of the whole set-up was the small white sign in the back window of the Ford. "5¢" was all it said.

"And away we go," grunted Shayne as he began to follow the Ford.

Speeding through the night, Shayne fell into the rhythm of the chase. Up ahead, the Ford with the sign in the rear window kept up a steady, comfortable pace. They went through patches of light and patches of darkness, always heading south — toward the Keys.

Somewhere in that string of connected islands, he was either going to find Brad Nicols — or run into some kind of a trap that might prove taxing to handle. Either way it could make a big difference in the case.

There was one aspect he didn't like. His client, Adams, owned a salvage yard. Hollis Johnson had put money into it. Johnson liked to put money into failing operations and swing them around — that was his life. So the salvage yard wasn't doing too well.

Then suppose the two astute businessmen heard about this newest racket, the chop shop. It would be a beautiful set-up — Brady's failing garage that the soft-hearted Pam had already made Hollis invest in, as a sop to Brady over losing his wife.

The chop shop solution fitted perfectly. Take over Brady's garage, pay him off through loans an use the garage to chop cars, use the salvage yard to hawk the parts.

But Shayne hated to think that Hollis would go that sour, or that his own judgment in picking clients had declined to where he'd work for a man involved in a big-time racket without his sensing something wrong.

There was a possibility that Stegner was trying some kind of an end run, taking advantage of Brady's upset. There was the possibility that Greg Johnson was a tool in the hands of Adams or

parties unknown working against Hollis' interest.

The only thing the redhead knew for sure was that the Nicholas garage was the hub of the case and that why Hollis bought it from a man he should have shunned was the axle that led to the right answers. Brady Nichols was the one living person who could answer both questions and Shayne hoped that he was going to meet him damn soon!

The lead car swung off the main highway on one of the Keys and soon Shayne found himself in a run-down area of fishing cottages and third-rate beach rentals. At last the Ford swung before one of these places, a low frame building, quite isolated, and stopped. By the time Shayne rolled up, his guide had flicked the 5¢ sign out of the window. Then he roared off in the return direction.

"Thank you, friend," said Shayne, pulling his gun out of the glove compartment. "Now let's see what chickens are roosting in this henhouse."

IX

THERE WASN'T MUCH chance of deception. Shayne could see a couple of lighted windows and knew that whoever was inside of this rundown isolated cottage was bound to have heard both the Ford and the Buick arrive. Blunt, direct action suggested itself.

He called, "*Brady!* Brady

Nichols! Pam — I'm coming in." Then, gun in hand, he opened the front door with a powerful heel-kick and moved on inside.

It was the same man he had seen in the *Sly Crome*, big, red-headed, and as Irish Paddy Pie as Shayne himself. Brady Nichols in person.

But there was a problem. Pam was there too. Brady held her by the shoulders and his revolver — the same one, no doubt, that had shot off Lucy's earring and slightly wounded Pam herself. Her big eyes were blue with terror as she tried to wriggle loose. "Shayne!" she called in piteous tones.

Mike Shayne looked into Nichols' eyes and saw the desperation of the hunted. It was not a moment to play the hero. The pulse along Nichols' throat jumped in high adrenalin warning.

Shane let his gun arm fall. "Let's not have any more shooting, Brady," he said. "Let's just talk."

"I've got nothing to say to you," said Brady. "I'm going to tie you up and I'm leaving her with Pam."

"Forget that, Brady. You're going to the police if you're smart. Somebody led me here. Somebody knows where you are. Somebody can bring the cops to you if you don't go to them. Who is it?"

"Screw you, shamus!" said Nichols. "Pam and I can handle our own affairs. She's going with me — after I tie you up. There's

some rope in the kitchen."

Shayne wasn't sure what it was. It must have been the look in Pam's eyes. She was scared, but not desperately scared. Suddenly her two hands shot up and she jerked Nichols' gun hand towards the ceiling, off her throat. At the next instant Shayne kicked. Brady's gun went off, but into the ceiling, and Shayne's well-timed kick sent Brady's gun after it.

But the other Irishman was also quick and evidently used to rough and tumble. In a smooth motion he lunged at Shayne and Shayne couldn't recover from his kick soon enough to avoid Brady's grab at his gun. Brady didn't get the gun, but he knocked it from Shayne's hand across the room.

The detective grappled with Brady and gave him a strong right to the stomach. Brady was set for it and had stomach muscles tight as iron. His blow took Shayne in the chest and the detective was forced to give back ground and cough.

The light of battle flared in twin sets of Irish eyes. Shayne cried, "*Dumb gunslinger!*" and flailed into the other man. Brady was no less spoiling for a fight. Evidently running and hiding was not his way — he lusted for action.

"*Nosy flatoo!*" he sang and flailed right back at Shayne.

They grappled, danced for an opening for a moment, while Pam screamed and then broke away and the battle was joined. Shayne,

had been in many a barroom brawl and in plenty of other scraps, but he soon realized that this fistfight was going to be a four-star affair.

Brady was quick, tough and about his own size and weight. Shayne took stunning blows on the jaw, on the shoulders, and in his stomach. They hurt like fury and stirred him to greater effort. He sang out his anger and renewed his furious attack.

Almost the same thing seemed to happen to Brady. He seemed astonished that Shayne didn't fold up at his first blows, and soon his left eye was closed and blood appeared at his mouth and nose. He also sang out his frustration and anger.

Both men went crashing into the wall, falling on the floor, ripping their clothes. Shayne suddenly realized that he was having a helluva good time, despite the cuts and bruises, because it was sheer relief to tangle fists with someone of his own abilities where he need pull no punches. He attacked with new vigor.

Each onslaught seemed to stimulate Brady in exactly the same way. His fists pounded Shayne furiously and they burned up flaring Irish energy in the Paddy brawl of the year.

Around the rim of the action, Pam sang out her awe and fear like some storybook princess being fought over by two gladiators.

Shayne was exhausted now and

stumbling, missing some punches. But Brady was worse off. The redhead hammered him around the jaw and Brady went down. Brady gave Shayne a terrific right to the head and Shayne went down. But he managed to get up again, his head singing, and plough into Brady and the blow that had downed Shayne was the last full blow Brady landed.

Shayne had the edge, a thin edge but the edge. Maybe it was his fury over Lucy, getting it back for that outrage. His brain kept thinking as he hit Brady "*This one's for Lucy!*" "*Here's another for Lucy!*"

It turned into a rout. Every time Brady got up, Shayne knocked him down, but he shook his head when Shayne said, "Had enough?" Then Shayne dropped his fists and pushed Brady down with his open palm. Brady sat there, dazed, shaking his head. Then his head seemed to clear, and he looked up at Shayne — and a grin cut his battered face.

"Why are we fighting?" he asked. "You won, and I don't mind losing to another Irishman."

Shayne couldn't help grinning back. He reached down and gave Brady a hand up, and the two men staggered around for a few minutes, testing their bruised and battered areas.

"That was a foolish waste of time," said Pam. Shayne almost expected her to stamp her foot, from the expression on her face.

Instead, she folded her arms and said, "The two of you look like a couple of battered alley cats. Was all this necessary?"

They both nodded solemnly.

"Now Brady is ready to go to the police and we can start getting this mess cleared up," said Shayne. "Am I right?"

"I'll go, Shayne," said Nichols. "You've got to promise me to take care of Pam. I think she's in danger."

"That's why I came to see him," Pam explained. "Brady wants me to—"

"Why don't we save it," said Brady. "We can untangle the whole thing when we get back to Miami."

That was all right with Shayne, who was anxious to get the two of them back to the city. The whole case was about to come into focus, and it looked like Brady was on the side of the angels, in spite of his wildness. Shayne insisted that all three ride in his car. Pam's car and Brady's could be taken care of later.

The redhead didn't really want to wait until they reached the police station to get Brady's story. He counted on the monotony of the long ride to loosen the man's tongue. The fist fight had gone a long way towards establishing communication with the rugged garage owner.

Shayne felt Pam's small, warm body pressed next to his like a kitten pressed to its mother. She

sighed a few times but seemed content to ride in silence, flanked by the two big Irishmen. Brady, on the outside stared gloomily through the windshield, grunting from time to time as if a theater of thoughts ran a film in his brain and some episodes disturbed him.

At length Shayne said, "We found out about the chop shops, Brady. A character from Chicago named Harry the Shuttle was the tipoff. He was down here. In fact, he tried to run a stolen car into your garage. We found out that he was a car-puller up north. Chicago seems to be the center of this racket."

"Never heard of the man," grunted Brady.

Shayne braked for a stop light. "You might want to dig around in your own garage, Brady. Find out if there's anything going on during the midnight hours."

Brady grunted. He swung open the car door. His feet hit the pavement and he was gone into the blackness of the night. Pam let out a loud wail of shock.

"Braaadeeeeeeee!"

Shayne cursed and spun out of the driver's seat and started after the vanishing man. The street was almost deserted, but there was one car moving up behind Shayne's. Some instinct made him stop and turn back to the Buick. That other car looked like the Ford that had led him to Nichols.

He dashed back to his car, ducked into the driver's seat and

sent Pam sprawling with a shove. The bullet clipped through his car and would have hit Pam if Shayne hadn't pushed her. The Ford spun around past Shayne's car and roared off down the road.

Shayne cursed and raced after the Ford. He was able to get off one shot, before the red taillights vanished into the night in a turn that the driver knew and Shayne didn't.

"Oh, Mr. Shayne!" wailed Pam. "What's going on? What's happening? Why did Brady run off? Why did somebody try to shoot me?"

Shayne slowed his car down to the normal highway pace.

"Thieves fall out," said Shayne. "I'm afraid there's bad news, Pam. Brady isn't your wild, reckless lover. Brady's into something deep and ugly and I'm afraid he started it himself." The pieces had finally begun to come together in the mind of the private detective.

X

IT WAS TWENTY-FOUR hours later and once again Pamela Nichols Johnson sat next to Shayne in his Buick. They were parked up the street from a fancy bar and watching Greg Johnson as he stood in the parking lot chatting with a well-dressed young man. They stood beside a Jaguar that had been restored. The man Greg talked to had a hand proudly on the car, stroking it as if it were

a prized woman.

Pam told Shayne the name of the young man. She'd met most of the people Greg knew and this was the third contact tonight that they'd seen Greg make as they followed him.

"But, Mike this is too depressing," said Pam. "Are you sure that Greg is mixed up with all these car thefts?"

"It has to be, doll. We spent all day checking on expensive stolen cars. Too many of them belong to people that Greg knows. You can see how he floats around the tennis clubs in the daytime and the bars at night."

"And dancing," she sighed.

"Another good way to size up the cars the people in his crowd drive," said Shayne. "You were a real asset to Greg besides a good dancing partner."

Greg floated back to his own car and took off, but Shayne still sat there. The young man with the Jag went on into the bar.

"Aren't we going to follow Greg some more?" asked Pam.

"I've seen enough. I want to watch the Jag for a little while."

The car-puller hit it fifteen minutes later and then Shayne was rolling after the stolen car, glad that he'd chosen one so easy to follow and feeling lucky that this one was ready for a pull.

"Just to pay off those gambling debts," sighed Pam. "Too bad he just didn't tell me. I would have worked on Hollis."

"It wouldn't have worked, Pam. I'm afraid Greg's been at this for quite a while."

"With Brady."

"Yes."

Shayne went on to explain that he was afraid Brady had used his garage for some time as a spotting point for cars to be stolen. Long before there were chop shops. In Chicago first and then here in Miami. He had married Pam and then later, when Pam drifted apart a little from Brady and went to dances on her own, she met Greg.

"That's when the game changed, Pam. But I can't tell you all about this tonight."

Pam's blue eyes filled with misery. It's all so ugly, Mike."

"It could get even uglier," said Shayne. "That's why I want you with me. There's another reason besides spotting the people Greg talks to."

The big salvage yard that the Jag led them to looked dark and silent, closed for the night. But the car had barely pulled up to the main gate when it slid open and the Jag rolled in. This time there was no delay while the car was left on the street to see if it was safe to be picked up. Somebody wanted the Jag's parts in a hurry, Shayne decided, and was paying enough for a risk to be taken.

The yard covered a couple of blocks. It was on the outskirts of town in the low rent district, surrounded by a high fence and

isolated from everything except a dark factory building across the street. Shayne didn't worry about the isolated location. All he wanted on this trip was to spot the particular salvage yard the outfit used. Now he could call the police and they could hit the yard while the hot car was inside. He certainly wouldn't tackle it himself with Pam in the car.

He started to swing around — and then he saw the trap. There was a black car on his left and a gray car on his right, closing in. His mind computed the chances and saw they were not good to make a run for it on the streets. Even so, he might have tried if he hadn't brought the woman along.

So he took the opening he knew they wanted him to take, directly through the wide open gate and into the salvage yard. As his Buick roared in, the Jag roared out and the big gate swung rapidly shut, belying its rusted appearance.

"Why, that other car left!" cried Pam.

"Yes, and we're boxed in," said Shayne easing out his gun. "Somebody spotted us following Greg and began to follow us. I should have been warned when they brought the Jag directly here."

"But why?" asked Pam.

Mike Shayne didn't answer that. He knew why and he didn't want to upset the little blonde

whose life was now in jeopardy because they'd been tagged. He regretted it, yet in his business risks like this occasionally had to be taken. He had needed Pam tonight to identify the people Greg spoke to, and he still had a trick or two to pull.

The redhead kept moving once they were inside the yard. There were aisles — aisles of roadspace between high piles of auto parts. Here was a stack of axles, next to that a pile of gas tanks and mufflers. Another stack consisted mostly of fenders. As he drove deeper into the yard, they reached a part where complete old wrecks and body shells rested.

His pursuers were being careful. The two cars had followed him into the lot and bumped along the dirt tracks slowly, behind him. Then one swung to the left, no doubt to cut him off up ahead.

"Pam, did you ever use a car telephone?"

"Yes. Hollis had them in all his cars."

"Okay. I'm betting that, while they know my car, they haven't thought about my phone. The only trouble is, we're not going to get time to make the necessary call. If they see me with a phone in my hand, all hell will break loose, so — let's go."

He stopped the car and dug out of the driver's seat, pulling Pam with him. There was a shot, and a bullet screamed near them.

"Afraid?" he asked Pam.

"Not when I'm with you, Mr. Shayne — Mike."

"Good girl. Grab my belt. Let's travel."

They rushed across the open space to hide among a stack of ancient engines. Two more shots rang out. They weren't even close.

"Stegner, you won't get away with this!" The detective roared into the darkness. "We had a police car following us!"

There was no answer from the darkness, but Pam cried. "Why, that's the man that worked for Brady."

"And who double-crossed him," said Shayne. He didn't add that it was Pam that Stegner wanted to get tonight, to add the fourth and final corpse to the White Satin Widow Kill — the widow herself.

Shayne squeezed off a couple of shots in the direction of their pursuers.

"They're in no hurry. They think they've got all night. Now listen, Pam. I made sure they saw the two of us leave my car. While I keep them busy, you're going to sneak back and use the car radio telephone. They won't be watching what they think is an empty car. Just lie on the seat, keep your head down, leave the door open as we left it and you'll be all right."

He told her whom to call and what to say.

"But how can we be sure they won't know we split up?" she asked.

"Because you're going to be wounded," said Shayne grimly. "Can you scream?"

"I can scream. I've wanted to for the last few minutes."

"Good! The next time they fire, I want you to scream like a banshee and then moan."

Shayne looked around until he found what he wanted — an old gunny sack half filled with parts. He stuffed weeds into it to bulk it out. Then he suddenly stood up and shouted, "Stegner, *white flag!* I want to talk to —"

A barrage of bullets came but Shayne wasn't there, because he ducked even as he shouted. Pam screamed. Her high voice echoed and rebounded from the piles of scrap. And then she gave a series of moans that made even Shayne's backbone tingle.

"Good!" he whispered. "Here goes!"

He grabbed his "wounded" partner and made his run for another pile of parts, cursing and shouting to Stegner that the woman was hit. More shots struck around him. He made still another dash, away from the firing points and put more distance between him and Pam. That got him some more shots and he cried out.

"*Dammit, Stegner, the girl's bleeding bad.*"

That time Stegner answered him.

"It won't matter, Shayne. It won't matter at all." That was followed by a self-satisfied laugh.

Shayne snapped off three shots and refilled his gun. He pretended to make a dash for still another pile of parts with his burden, which in the murk could well have been the wounded girl.

Then he let the fire of Stegner and his men drive him back. He had already spotted a shadow flitting back towards the Buick. Pam was on her way. A terrific girl, he decided. She deserved much better than being made a pawn of, as she had been by Brady Nichols.

It was only a matter of stringing it out now. Shayne used his ammunition carefully as Stegner's forces closed in on him, but it was going to be tight, very tight. Stegner must have six or eight men out there besides himself. As they closed in from all sides, Shayne took his post in the rusted body of a heavy car.

He was safe enough here from their distant fire, but they kept working in closer, approved guerrilla fashion, a man or two running and dropping, first on one side, then the other. As soon as he fired at one runner, another would pop up behind him and move in closer.

A man ran. Shayne fired. There was a scream, and knew he had finally gotten one. The man didn't move once he hit the ground. They were close enough now that the shooting was more accurate for both sides.

Somehow that first blood — that

first striking back of law and society against the lawless ones — made Shayne feel better. The tide of the whole affair had changed. Almost enough time had passed...

"Stegner, I think the girl's dead," he called out.

"Okay, Shayne. We don't want you. Drop your gun and come out when we show a light."

XI

SHAYNE PONDERED this. It was a master risk because he knew they wouldn't let him walk out of this salvage yard alive. But he wanted desperately to talk to Stegner face to face before the police came. Once the law had the Chicago man, he'd never say more than two words — "Not guilty". Now, when he thought he was on top, he might be more talkative.

Stegner's men drove up two cars, headlights on, and they formed a pool of light in the middle of one of the rutted roads. Shayne thought, *Here goes*, and stepped out into the light, hands above his head.

Stegner sauntered into the pool of light, and two or three of his men followed, guns ready, eyes cold and suspicious on the private detective.

Shayne walked into the circle of light and dropped his hands. One of the mob jumped back and began to raise his gun but Stegner stopped him. Nichols' manager

looked as harried and servile as he had in his dirty white coat on the floor of the garage that day. There was nothing servile about his tone, however.

"Where is she, Shayne?"

Shayne jerked his thumb back into the darkness. "Lying in the dirt filled with bullets, you bastard. Why did you shoot her?"

Stegner's answer was almost supercilious, as if he'd been asked why he stole a five-dollar bill from someone.

"Why, Greg Johnson wanted her dead so he could inherit the whole Johnson estate," he said, his eyes smiling at Shayne.

"Wrong," said Shayne. "Greg doesn't deal in death. Not with his father, or the chauffeur or Pam. All he does is help you steal cars for the chop shop you and Brady ran."

Stegner raised his eyes. "So Brady spilled his guts last night before he took off."

Shayne didn't answer that. "You wanted her dead for that reason, Stegner. Because you control Greg, and through him you could control the whole Johnson fortune. That's why you crossed up Brady in his murder scheme. The stakes were big enough."

"Hey, you've detected quite a lot," said Stegner.

"Not too hard, Stegner. Backgrounds are what count. We found out that Brady had a good reason to leave Chicago a while back."

He's a wild one all right. He killed his first wife in a rage. He got off with the help of powerful friends, maybe even mob friends.

"He was already into the garage and theft business back then. So for him, Miami was more of the same. When certain cars came in for repairs, Brady made certain notes, collected information, and later the cars could be stolen. That was before there was a chop-shop operation."

"Go on, Shayne. It's *your* story," said Stegner.

"Then something happened that turned Nichols all the way around. His wife ran into Greg Johnson and did her innocent dancing thing. Brady didn't mind — he had no time for stuff like that. But Greg introduced her to his father, and his father wanted the woman, and Brady saw a real chance to make it into the big money all in one leap.

"Pretend to go ape over Pam's career, make her divorce him, let nature take its course. He knew he could always pull her back. She dug big, hard-fisted Irish red-heads above all."

Shayne thought for a moment with a twinge of regret about the night in his apartment with Pam.

"As Hollis' widow, she'd be into millions. She could control Greg. No problems. Brady could remarry the rich widow and the whole Johnson fortune was his. It must've looked like a mountain of gold compared to what Brady

made with his garage and the thefts."

"You still haven't got to the chop shops," said Stegner.

"I'm sure you can answer that, Stegner," said Shayne. "That's your specialty. Brady's backers sent you down here to expand Nichols' operation. Brady didn't care. Pam was safely married to Hollis and it was about time to hurry nature and drop the elderly rich man down the well."

"Then Brady was out of the car business and thievery, the whole thing with all its dangers, for good."

"That sounds like the Brady I know," grinned Stegner. "He sure wanted to be a rich man and not work any more."

"He needed you, Stegner, to pull the job. Also to give him an alibi. That was where he made his mistake."

Shayne stopped. Stegner stared at him, his eyes glinting. Shayne could tell that the man wanted to brag about what he'd done to Nichols but hesitated, even if Shayne wasn't going to live too long.

"We can't find the body!" A voice floated to them.

Shayne whirled around. "I told you in that stack over *there*, you *meatheads!*" he roared. He turned back to Stegner. "Christ, you've got some nummies working for you. I'm surprised they can steal and chop bicycles without getting caught."

Stegner flushed and roared at his men. Then he turned back to Shayne. "Sure, I waxed that crazy bastard. He offered me peanuts and it was so easy to rewrite the script."

He told Shayne that Brady's plan was to have Hollis killed while he was with Bonnie Truit. Bonnie would be killed, too, and it would look like a sordid sex squabble, murder and suicide by the dead prostitute. The police wouldn't dig into that too closely.

"I was down in the street with Harry the Shuttle that night. I'd already decided to pop the old man's car. Why waste an easy strike? In that neighborhood, the theft of a Caddy was as natural as breathing. But the old goat saw us from the window and came pounding down the stairs. That's when I realized that I didn't need Brady at all.

"I hit the old bastard and he went down. The rest was easy. Brady was already set to pull that fake shooting of his ex-wife later, and I'd alibi him earlier. All I had to do was change the script, refuse to give Brady his alibi and Brady had bought it. I had it all. The garage and a hook on the Johnson money through that tennis-playing bum."

"And you shot Williams."

"Had to. The Bonnie thing was out the window. Both Williams and Bonnie knew what Greg was up to and they couldn't stand pressure. The Shuttle was sup-

posed to cut her off, but he dawdled, the bastard. He was supposed to kill you, too, Shayne, but he lacked the nerve, the klutz!"

Shayne hoped the police were near because Stegner moved back ominously now.

"I don't lack that nerve, Shayne. But you did so good on the case I hated to see you die without knowing how close you came. Incidentally, this isn't our regular salvage yard, so the cops won't find anything here. It'll all fall on Nichols -- who must be halfway through South America by now.

"Word's come back that he's running like a scared dog and we won't worry about him at all. The cops'll think he lured you and Bonnie here and did it. Burned bodies, and all that. I'll play innocent while the whole chop-shop scene goes off in Brady's name, and when the dust settles, I'll help Greg manage his father's money."

Delighted with his victory, Stegner had to add another statement. "Guys on top don't realize that the guys they hire have ambitions and sometimes the smarts to go with it."

Shayne got ready for his leap on Stegner. The police were later than he wanted. The police were —

At that moment one of Stegner's underlings shouted: "The woman's body isn't here. The

shamus must be kidding us."

Worried, Stegner turned on Shayne and brought up his gun. But already there was that familiar egg-beater-in-the-sky sound, and two police helicopters came low over the wall of the salvage yard, big floodlights shining down. The lights pinned the group as the copters circled over the group on the ground.

The loudspeaker sounded:

"Drop all weapons. No one is to move. We are covering you. There are police at the gate, on the ground."

The men froze. Stegner cursed and hurled his gun at Shayne, who ducked. Stegner turned and ran.

"Halt!"

"Give it up, Stegner!" shouted Shayne.

But Stegner kept running toward the darkness and there was a blast of gunfire from the copters. Stegner screamed and went down...

Five people sat around Shayne's desk in his office. They were, besides Shayne, Adams, Fox, Grimshaw and, across from them, Pamela Johnson.

"— so you see," Shayne finished, "Pam was used, first by Brady Nichols and then by Greg Johnson, and I think it's important for you to know that she had nothing to do with Hollis Johnson's bad luck."

"I suppose Brady won't ever be caught," said Adams.

"Probably not," said Shayne. "but if he ever does show up, it'll be to go to jail for a good long time. At least, he didn't kill anybody, not in Miami."

"I'm so sorry about Hollis," said Pam. "When I learned about what Brady did in Chicago and what he was actually up to — well, I guess I never really knew him, and I didn't ask enough questions. But I did try to be a good wife to Hollis."

"And Stegner's dead and the chop-shop gang cleaned up. We won't have any of that around here, at least for a while," said Grimshaw. "You did a brilliant job, Mr. Shayne, and I, for one, recommend a bonus."

"What about this Bonnie Truit?" asked Fox.

"She's recovering," said Shayne. "It was the extreme fear of Stegner and Nichols that sent her temporarily around the bend. Through Greg, Stegner had a finger on Williams and on her through Williams."

The group shook its head over the sad business of Hollis' son. He was out on bail, but certain to be convicted for setting up the theft of the cars of his friends and acquaintances. There was a lot of anger among his set, and even if the young man received a short prison sentence, he would never be accepted again in the Florida scene. That, for him, was an effective second sentence.

Grimshaw got up and turned to

Pam. "Well, young lady, since Hollis had no close relatives except young Greg, and considering his plight, you are a fortunate person. Very rich and very free. I hope you make good use of your opportunities." He bowed stiffly and left.

Fox was a little more generous. The fat man took both of Pam's hands. "Maybe we didn't see it right, Pam. I know you brought a lot of joy and pleasure into our friend's life, and we should thank you for that." He also left the office, as Pam blushed and thanked him.

Adams said, "You also now own the Nichols garage, Mrs. Johnson, since Hollis bought the controlling interest through those loans. I am prepared to make you an offer on that, and help with other matters where Hollis' money tied in with ours. For instance, I have an interest in a disco, a new business that I invested in but that doesn't please me. We might work out a trade, with adjustments."

Pam jumped up and clapped her hands. "I never *thought* of that! I could buy my own disco. Oh, yes, Mr. Adams, I'd be very interested in *that*." Her blue eyes shone with pleasure.

Then her eyes darkened and she turned a worried face on Shayne. "Of course, I'm pretty dumb; and I'd need some help, a partner —"

"Pam," said Shayne. "Grow up and quit looking for fathers or older brothers. These days,

women get right into the business world with men and do very well when they pick something that interests them. You don't have to cling to a man's arm any more."

She ran into Shayne's arms and hugged him and that time he kissed her on the mouth. His main purpose in holding this meeting was to involve Adams and his group with Pam and her new fortune. He turned her over to Adams and the two left the office chatting in animation.

Her arm was through Adams' and she looked up at him with shining eyes. The man looked flattered and pleased. She would, thought Shayne, be in good shape with three new protectors. He had no doubt that she would even win over the stuffy Grimshaw in the end.

Shayne followed them to the outer office and when they were gone he turned to Lucy. And then did a double take.

"Well," said Lucy, blushing, "how do you like it?"

She had taken off her jacket as she sat at her desk and the blouse she wore was — white satin. Shayne struck his forehead with his palm.

"Well, Michael, everybody's wearing satin this season," she said, dropping her eyes.

Shayne laughed and Lucy looked up into his face and then she laughed and, since it was noontime, they went off arm in arm to lunch.

Stranger In Town

by JEAN F. CAPRON

Polly enjoyed being the only witness to the murders — until the mysterious young man moved in across the street.

THE MAIN TROUBLE with breathing was, it had to be kept up. Inhale followed by exhale. Mae Kellogg, her throat swelling beneath the pressure of steel fingers, wasn't at all certain she felt up to the try. She opened her mouth. A strangled moan made it past her thickened tongue, then faded to a gurgle.

Mae's eyes bulged, desperately needing to see beyond a reddened blur. Her own fingers reached out to claw the air, trying to latch onto something solid...anything solid. Her fingernails, scissor-sharp, clawed human flesh, and launched into feeble battle.

From somewhere out there, she heard a muffled bleat, and an inner spark of her exulted, tasting some sort of victory. She was vaguely conscious of a shifting of the fingers at her throat. And then, a whir of sound, as the crimson blur darkened to spiraling blackness...

Naturally, it monopolized the Springfield Street conversation for the rest of June. Another myster-

ious violent death committed, neat as you please, right under the neighborhood's nose. A woman again. Mae Kellogg, a newcomer, occupying the furnished upstairs apartment of the old Jarvis house. She had been a widow. Pretty, in a plump, middle-aged way, easy-going and friendly. A senseless murder. As had been the others.

Still, this time there had been clues. A witness. Polly Alexander, who lived across from the murder scene, had been supplying the details to whoever would listen (including the reporters from the out-of-town newspapers) about how she had seen this man hanging around, the afternoon of the murder.

Even now, a month later, on her front porch glider, with her knitting needles going like sixty on the raglan sleeve of her sweater, Polly was recounting them to her neighbor, Marion Anthony, who remained alert through the whole busy tale.

About how this tall fellow with

dark hair, wearing a blue-denim jacket and faded denim jeans, had rung the upstairs doorbell of the Jarvis house (Polly had watched, through her curtained window, because you never knew *what* a stranger might be up to), and when Mae came to the door, they had talked, and the man had followed her in.

Later, Polly had seen him leave. Of course she hadn't added two and two until after the body had been discovered, and the police...

"The police," Marion echoed, her eyes rounding. "Polly, do you realize you're the only one able to identify —"

"But of course I wasn't wearing my glasses at the time," Polly cut her short. She brushed her pale hair from her bifocals. "So when they asked me for a better description, naturally, I..." The needles went back to clacking.

Then Marion remembered what she had come over to tell. Of the young man who had stopped at her door that morning, inquiring about the Jarvis house. "Says his name's Tim Christopher. Calls himself a writer. And he was bursting with questions about Mae's murder. Says he's doing research for some big-time magazine that specializes in crimes of violence.

"He wanted to know if Mae's apartment was available for rent. I had to tell him yes. And when I filled him in about you — being a witness, I mean — he got all

pepped up. Says he'll be over to interview you first chance he gets."

Polly's fingers paused. "Interview? *Me?*" She mulled it over. "Gosh, Marion, I really don't think I *should*." But anyone could tell she was champing at the bit...

Polly recovered first and took a blink-eyed measure of Tim Christopher. Not bad, she decided, if you went in for tall, dark and clean-cut. Personally, she was partial to the more substantial adult type. Like her present beau, Joe Chandler, who managed his own clothing store, and appreciated her company.

"Nice place you have here," he noted, his gaze taking in the rock garden she labored in, hand-weeding twice a week. The brooding eyes flicked to Polly, cataloguing...what? But then, what could he see? A lanky fortyish spinster female with ash-blonde hair cradled in a cheerful kerchief, wearing a turtleneck blouse and maroon slacks.

"You must be Polly Alexander," he said. The eyes zeroed in on her.

Why did she receive the eerie sensation that her innermost parts had been x-rayed? Her fingers automatically sought out her throat and tightened on the turtleneck. She smiled brightly. "Why? Is it written on my forehead?"

In the laughter that followed, Tim Christopher made his

esearch wants known. And Polly, er uneasiness lulled, told him bout the scrapbook she had been eeping on the murders. When he llowed her into the meticulously- ept parlor, chatting amiably as e moved, it had ceased to trouble er.

With Marion hovering behind, nd Tim next to her on the loveeat, she spread open the pages. he newsprint likeness of Loraine Veiler, first victim, peered back. 'She was a private-duty nurse,'' Polly explained, watching Tim write the details in his notebook. 'Found at the bottom of her stairway, with a kitchen knife in her ibs."

"Lorraine had been speciaing he late Mrs. Chandler," Marion volunteered. "The police assume he let in the killer."

"But...no clues?" Tim's voice came softly.

The second victim, Holly March, was found behind the counter of the downtown bakery she managed. A handsome red-head with a figure to match. At first it appeared she had fallen and struck her head. Until somebody noticed the small-caliber hole between her shoulder blades.

"And, of course, Mae Kellogg." Polly pointed out a crinkled print of the latest, reading aloud the accompanying item. "Such a nice person. She'd just joined our bowling team, and was coming along so well..." She aimed a stricken glance at Tim.

"Sad," Tim agreed. "Very sad."

"She didn't come from around here," Marion chimed in. "And right after the autopsy, her family whisked her remains away. Not one of us had a chance to attend the funeral." She sounded offended, as if that lapse were the *real* crime.

"But this time there was a witness?"

"There certainly was," Polly declared, looking triumphant.

"And the description?" His pencil poised over the notebook.

"A tall man with dark hair, denim trousers and jeans."

Tim Christopher studied his written words through veiled eyes. "Oh? Then you'd be able to recognize..." His eyes slid upward, to meet hers.

An unaccountable feeling of foreboding shivered up Polly's spine. She stood up quickly. "I think that will do for now, Mr. Christopher. If I recall anything else, I'll let you know."

"Fine." He snapped shut the notebook. "I've taken rooms at the Jarvis place. You'll be seeing more of me. You can count on it."

He loped past them and let himself out.

He had made a project of interviewing the neighbors, asking carefully phrased questions and dutifully writing down the answers. And he had spotted a significance. Would anyone else? Now, he sat in the darkened

apartment, hunched forward in a Boston rocker, trying to sort out his thoughts and emotions.

But a restlessness was growing in him. A need to get it done and over with. After a while he slipped into his denim jacket and sneakers eased down the stairs, past the side door, and into the night...

She was there, all right. Attached to the glider, moving it aimlessly in the dim porch light. From his hiding place behind her trimmed hedge, he watched, and listened. And worked it over in his mind. He inched closer.

The glider picked up speed, creaking beneath her weight. He could hear a humming sound. Polly Alexander, humming to herself in the near-dark.

He would wait, he decided. Another day or two. Yeah. Until he'd nailed it down, he would hold himself in check and wait.

Polly was on her knees in the rock garden, attacking weeds in a fine fury. Her fingers thrust among them, yanking blindly, not even caring that the alyssum and mixed pinks she had been babying along had come up, too.

She reared up once and glared in the direction of Marion's house, then sank back on her haunches, dreading the inevitable thought. The dull ache had started up inside her head again. And the pulsebeat at the base of her throat was drumming its wild message.

Not good, she cautioned herself. Forget it...

But this time had been the worst yet. Joe Chandler, and her best friend. Caught dead to rights. After all his sweet-talk, and those whispered promises.

Her gaze lit onto young Christopher, loping up the Jarvis walk. Tall, dark and rugged. Now very much at home in his faded jeans and jacket. Hmmm. Hadn't she described just such a male image, so many times, to so many people, she could recite the description in her sleep?

From somewhere a thread of an idea silently unraveled and attached itself to her brain. A muscle twitched and tightened along her forefinger. Maybe, she thought, with a little luck and a sense of timing, the image could be made real. Just maybe it could be used again...

She had barely made it back to the house when her phone rang. It was the writer, Tim Christopher. And he spoke of clues. Significant things he had found in the Kellogg apartment.

"Clues?" Her voice echoed hollowly. She cleared her throat. "I don't understand. The police went through Mae's apartment, and they didn't find —"

"My interviews suggest that the man, Chandler, holds the key here. In one way or another, all three women are linked to him. Loraine Weiler nursed his wife through her last illness, and I understand they were pretty cozy."

The redhead, Holly March, managed the bakery next to his store, and the local scuttlebut has it they shared more than iced crullers. Mae Kellogg was a lonely woman who may have been flattered by his attention. There, fore, I'd say —"

He figured — Joe? A tension let go, at the pit of her stomach. Well, why not Joe? It could be arranged...

" — however, I've discovered that Chandler has an air-tight alibi, so no dice there. Which suggests a jealousy angle. A fourth woman who couldn't stand sharing her man with —"

"What? That is ridiculous —"

"I found a little black book behind the kitchen sink. Mae Kellogg's diary. I've been leafing through it. And, sure enough..." His voice dropped an octave "...she named a fourth woman, Polly; What's more, she suspected..." Pause. And then, "Polly? Are you still there?"

But Polly had already moved away from the phone and was working on the next one.

The garden shears, this time. Why not? As good a weapon as any. She had borrowed them (without asking) from Marion a couple of weeks before. Let Marion explain that away, when the time came.

As for the turtleneck.... She debated the necessity for it, at this stage of the game, then figured,

better to be safe. She donned the turtleneck blouse that had been part of her uniform for more than a month, easing it over the half-healed neck wound. Dropping the garden shears into her tote bag, she marched briskly past her front door.

Sneaking up on him, as she had Mae and the others, might prove impossible. She could tell, by the set of his shoulders when he moved toward her, that Tim Christopher would be no push-over. She'd have to proceed carefully. Her fingers palpated the leather of her tote bag, needing to know the garden shears were there.

"I thought you'd come," he said. A tiny smile played at his mouth, as if he knew plenty more than he was telling.

The pulsebeat at her throat took off on a run, tomtomming an urgent beat. She couldn't ignore it much longer. Her eyes narrowed, trying to focus on the small black something in his hand. She wished, suddenly, that she'd worn her bifocals.

He moved in close. She could feel his breath, warm on her face. "Why, Polly? Why did you do it?"

Had the room all at once become airless? Her own breath seemed stuck somewhere in her chest, unable to get out. She ran a panicky finger around the turtleneck. Nothing.

"You hated them? Was that it?"

She stared up at him. "Hate?" She ran the word over her tongue and found it distasteful. "I believe the more positive term would be love."

"Love?" he echoed, looking slightly stunned.

"I loved Joe Chandler," she said. "And, naturally, when they got in the way, they had to be removed. I mean, what else could I do?"

"Naturally," he murmured. "What else?"

Her fingers had begun to work on the drawstrings of the tote bag. Carefully. Not wanting to disturb his concentration.

He'd moved away from her, and was standing by the window, gazing out. "Love!" he repeated. "Can you beat that?"

Her fingers had found the shears. Past experience had taught her to make it quick. Quick and simple. Therefore, fewer complications.

A step at a time. Aim for the upper spine. Count to five, and then —

She raised the shears high and thrust forward...

...in the split-second that Tim Christopher, timing it right, side-stepped away from the window.

He moved on shaky legs to the window and stared past the shattered pane.

She lay on her back against the curb, sprawled like a giant rag doll bashed against the pavement until it parted at the seams. The garden

shears, hanging at a grotesque angle from her doubled-over thumb, had done savage things to the contours of her face.

One skinny arm lifted, as if summoning help from beyond, twitched, fell sideways, then was still.

Globs of red stuff were already oozing past splintered skull-bone and skin, and matting the pale hair. Bright spatters of it stained the pavement, making a crude outline around the broken thing that had been Polly Alexander.

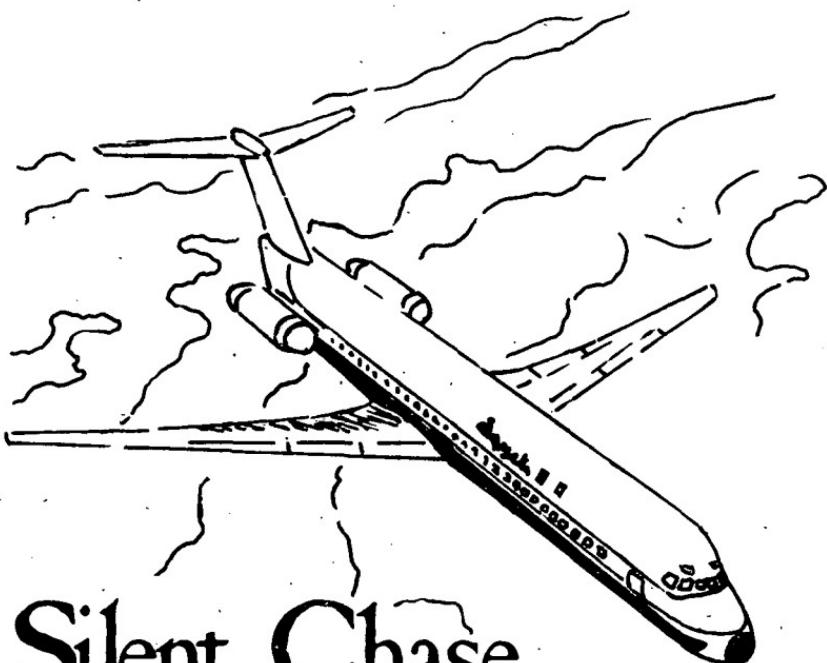
Marion Anthony spotted it first, and jack-rabbited over, baying her message as she came. Doors opened all along Springfield Street. Neighbors materialized in busy clusters and swarmed toward the remains like jackals bent on a feast.

There would be questions, of course. Now that Polly had been discovered, the police...

Tim pressed the *stop* lever on the tiny black tape recorder and slipped it into his pocket. He permitted himself a thin smile. Ah, yes, the police. It would all be on the tape. Proof enough. But, first —

"Ma," he whispered, soft as a hush, "we nailed her."

Timothy Christopher Kellogg moved, as in a dream, back to his living room and to the Boston rocker, then eased himself onto it. Lacing his fingers over his flat belly, he creaked back and forth, humming to himself....



Silent Chase

by GERALD TOMLINSON

Years ago, Tom Chase had stood by while his wife was murdered — so when he found himself a hit man's target, he decided to fight back.

IT WAS LUCKY for me I have good night vision. I wasn't supposed to see the black barrel of a shotgun poking out the front window of the gray sedan, but I saw it, and it was aimed straight at me.

Who could want to kill me? I had many quiet friends and, as far as I knew, no armed enemies.

Fear overruled logic. I dived to the ground on the far side of the sidewalk and watched as the blast tore into the dense boxwood hedge

above my head. The shotgun is not a subtle weapon.

My popularity in serious doubt, I jumped sideways over the three-foot hedge, adrenalin pumping. Hidden from Market Street, I crawled hastily toward the courthouse, away from the street lamps. I expected pursuit, but none came. A few yards from the street I got up and ran.

The sheriff's office was in the basement of the courthouse, half a block away, across a scraggly lawn, down narrow concrete steps. I took them two at a time. A youngster who was probably a deputy sheriff sat at the only occupied desk, his face a pale white oval with freckles. When the cops begin to look like kids, you know you're getting old. He stared at me, and I stared back.

His mouth formed words, which my thoughts discounted. I didn't try to respond. My voice would have been harsh and unnatural. Besides, what could this youngster know about a shotgun poking out the front window of a gray sedan? This was dairy country, not mob territory. The deputy looked more like an innocent young farmboy than a seasoned city cop.

I should have reported the incident to him, of course. It's crazy to duck a shotgun blast and then walk away without mentioning it to someone. Anyone. I knew that in my mind but not in my heart.

I was tired of being a coward, tired of running away from myself and my responsibilities, tired of not taking action on my own. That may sound like a wild leap in thought, but if you had once watched, frightened, helpless, immobile, as your only daughter was mugged and murdered before your eyes, you might understand.

It had happened in New York City eight years ago. I was to meet Trish in front of her apartment, take her to dinner. It was dark. As I approached her First Avenue apartment, I heard nothing, although others heard her scream. But then, precious moments too late, I saw her being attacked. I was no more than fifty feet away. And I froze. Froze. My legs refused to move.

The sight of Trish's crumpled body has seldom been out of my mind since that day. For eight years I have lived without pride or hope. I struggled through with my job, with my grief-burdened wife, with my guilt. Nothing could erase that guilt. Day and night I was conscious of my one horrendous, irrevocable sin of omission. Of inaction.

Yet, ironically, I had been a combat soldier, and a good one, in World War Two. I knew how to fight, even how to kill. Why hadn't I fought back in New York? Why had I stood there like a stone statue? There were only two muggers, teenagers at that. Why hadn't I chased them? Why had I

let them get away? I didn't know the answer. Maybe I never would.

I turned now and left the sheriff's office. Despite, or perhaps because of, what had happened eight years ago, I couldn't bring myself to talk to this farm lad. Not there. Not then.

Maybe I did have a shred of pride left after all. Maybe I could fight back. Maybe I hadn't crossed Europe with Hodges' First Army merely to turn my middle-aged problems over to a freckle-faced kid. Maybe I had come to a time of testing. Someday, maybe someday, I would be able to forgive myself.

I walked the ten blocks to my motel room, shaken but, oddly enough, exhilarated. A glass of brandy helped to steady my nerves and clear my mind.

Few possibilities existed. I had been in Mannville just two weeks, alone. Nearly all my time had been spent at the typewriter or asleep or at the Mannville Public Library, researching the boyhood of an obscure Civil War general whose life I was reconstructing for the Department of the Army.

My job was a kind of one-man Federal Writers' Project. I was like a WPA worker leaning on my pencil rather than a shovel. My wife back in Silver Spring, Maryland, had never fully forgiven me for Trish's death. I couldn't blame her.

She stayed at home, refused to travel with me, called me a

tracker of trivia, and so I was. But my pay helped sweeten the occupational disgrace. At GS-13 on the Civil Service scale, I was functioning well above the poverty line.

No trivia tonight. I assumed that the library held the answer to the shotgun blast. Something must have happened there, something that made me dangerous to somebody, something I didn't know about. The attack had come within three minutes of my leaving the stacks for the street.

My watch read 8:35. The library closed at 9:00 p.m. Sandra Weinstein was on duty tonight, and I was glad for that. Sandra was a talented and unusual person with whom, in my own way, I could communicate.

I tossed down another glass of brandy, stepped into the shadowy street with its faint odor or lilacs and diesel oil, returned to the library. I passed the shattered hedge on the way. No gray sedan. No shotgun.

The library was a large building, three stories, red brick, with small-paned windows above stained and weathered marble steps. It had been built in railroading days, back when Mannville, a main depot on the Erie, was presumed to have a glorious future. As the Erie went, so went Mannville.

As I walked up the steps, I could see Sandra Weinstein through the double set of glass doors. She was

standing behind the oak counter, a slim brunette with intense brown eyes. She greeted me with a wave.

Yes, she remembered that there had been a stranger in the library that night. In fact, he had asked her to direct him to the 950 section of the stacks, up the green metal stairs and to the left, one aisle away from Civil War history, 937.7, my bailiwick.

She described him in detail. He lent himself to vivid description. He was tall, gaunt, with long black sideburns. But her chief impression was of his clothes. He wore a herringbone sports jacket with wide lapels, a tattersall shirt, a red bow tie, and a brown snap-brim hat. No one in Mannville dressed like that.

"Anything else?" I wondered. No, not about him. Wasn't that enough? He ought to stand out like a peacock among sparrows.

The only other person she had especially noticed, although there were quite a few people in the library, was Allan Morrison, the owner of the Mannville *Gazette* and one of the wealthiest men in town. A recent two-term mayor, his rosy face had local celebrity status. Morrison was no habitue of the Mannville Public Library, but this was hardly his first visit.

That was it, all the information she had. Thanking her, I turned and went out through the heavy glass door that led to the small vestibule. In the vestibule, set far back on either side, were two oak

benches. I had come to know them well. I had often sat on them while smoking a cigarette to break up the long days upstairs.

The first thing I met in the vestibule was my second shock of the evening — a brown snap-brim rising from the left-hand bench. The next thing I saw was a glittering short-barreled .38, or something very much like it, the kind of weapon that's good for shoot-outs in telephone booths.

A tall man with sideburns waited under the hat, behind the gun. He stepped up to meet me. Pointblank. My right foot greeted him first, cracking hard on his left shin, and my right hand chopped down across his wrist, snapping the .38 out of his hand.

The man grunted, snarled, his yellow eyes widened, but he stayed steady. He crouched, set himself to attack and, in the instant before his next move, every facial feature of the man burned itself into my memory.

I ducked his wide right, came up almost like a trained middle-weight, surprising myself after all these years, and dumped him to the floor with a short left to the chin. He started to scramble up.

Enough. I ran out the door. Across the lawn. Under dark arching trees through which the moon made eerie patterns on the grass. On the street again. Back to my room at the Viscount Motel on Church Street. Through the protecting door.

Safe for the moment, puffing but unhurt. I asked myself what in hell was going on.

It had been quite a fracas back there at the library. I wondered whether the herringbone gunman had had time and the presence of mind to grab his hat and his .38 before making his escape. Tomorrow's newspaper should tell.

Meanwhile, I needed a change of venue. A number of people at the library knew my name and my local address. I didn't want to be found in my room by this persistent would-be killer.

With more haste than usual, I packed my shaving kit, a dozen library books, a ream of type-writer paper, some pencils, a bottle of brandy and a few changes of underwear in my overnight bag. The rest of my luggage I left in the room.

Three blocks away, on a side street, I checked into the Ninth Ward Hotel, a tavern with gray asphalt siding and cheap rooms, registering under the name of George B. McClellan, an alias. It was the first name that came to mind.

Although my pencil sketches of Civil War generals have appeared in quite a few Government Printing Office books, they still aren't being grabbed up by major galleries and museums. They're accurate enough, though, in their representation of faces. So was the pencil sketch I made of the man in the snap-brim hat. When I had

finished the drawing, I could see as well in pencil as I had in reality the dull, lost expression in the gunman's eyes.

I wrote a note to accompany the sketch and mailed both to Howard Fitzsimmons, a long-time friend of mine in New York City, a fellow sergeant from the artillery days, now a detective lieutenant for the New York City Police Department. A true friend, he had helped me through the dark days after Trish's murder.

I didn't tell Howie who the target had been, but I did say I thought the man in the sketch was at large in upstate New York. As a favor (important, I said — cashing some old debts, he knew), I wanted to hear right away, by return mail, say, if there was any way he could come up with a name for the face.

After dropping the letter in the mailbox outside the tavern's front door, I went back to my room, paced the floor for an hour or so, then took to the lumpy mattress for a troubled night's sleep.

Three days passed, suffocating days. I read half a dozen scholarly books on the Jacksonian period, the late 1830's, those heady days of the Republic when my subject general had been struggling through West Point at the bottom of his class.

How, I asked myself, could a man face a military career with "56th in a class of 56" dogging his memory and his records from post

to post? A rhetorical question. He had done it, and I was memorializing him.

On the fourth day of my reading about the Jackson administration, I, or rather George B. McClellan, received a letter at the Ninth Ward Hotel. It came in a plain brown envelope. The desk clerk-bartender smirked when I picked it up. But the contents dealt with violence, not sex.

Dear Tom,

What the hell is this George B. McClellan stuff? Wasn't he a Civil War general?

Look, Tom, I hope the tall guy with sideburns isn't after you. He's bad news. His name is Harry "The Silencer" Regis — a hit man out of Cincinnati. Very cagy. Two known aliases: A. R. Chambers and Bucky Schott. Sense of humor, huh?

Three arrests, no convictions.

Take care, Tom. Stay away from this guy. Let the pros take care of him. And stop in and see us the next time you're in the City.

Howie

Now what did I know? Not a lot. The staff of the Mannville *Gazette* remained publicly unaware of the shotgun blast on Market Street, the fight in the library vestibule, and the presence in town of Harry "The Silencer" Regis. Maybe ignorance was bliss for them. It wasn't for me.

I read the latest *Gazette* as soon

as I finished Howie's letter. This time it told me more than I wanted to know. A banner headline, as loud as The Silencer's wardrobe, read, "Socialite Murdered in Mannville Heights."

The victim's name was Gail Morrison, the wife of Allan Morrison, owner of the Mannville *Gazette*. Robbery was the apparent motive. A box of jewels valued at \$35,000 was missing. According to ballistics, the murder weapon was a .25-caliber pistol.

Harry The Silencer was carrying an arsenal in the trunk of his gray sedan. A shotgun, a snub-nosed .38 and a .25-caliber pistol. That much I knew, or thought I knew. And I could guess more.

No wonder he had wanted me out of the way, this Cincinnati hit man. He thought I had overheard his plans. I could picture Harry Regis and Allan Morrison holding a quiet meeting up there in the 950 section of the library — way up there in the silent stacks — making the necessary arrangements to rub out Gail Morrison.

Ah, but unknown to them, I was seated at the end of the next aisle. At some point they saw me...and thought I had heard them. The best laid plans....

I laughed bitterly.

Then I thought of Gail Morrison and stopped laughing.

Had my silence, my embarrassment, condemned her to death? Had I stood aside for another murder — saying nothing,

doing nothing for a second time? Could that freckled sheriff's deputy, or someone in the city police, have prevented the killing of Gail Morrison? It wasn't a pleasant thought.

Three arrests for Harry The Silencer, no convictions, and that was disturbing, too. Like New York's muggers, the man could apparently kill with impunity.

My course was clear. It was time to stop running, time to stop cringing. I had a duty to perform, as surely as I had in my army days, as surely as I had — and failed at — when Trish was mugged. I would avenge Gail Morrison's death. Avenge Trish's, too, if you wanted to look at it that way.

The decision was a momentous one, and I knew it. I welcomed the chance it gave me. A chance for redemption.

The chase would take me to Cincinnati, since Regis would no longer be in Mannville. His job here was completed.

I walked downtown to a hardware store, my doubts gone, and bought a hard-rubber mallet with a wooden handle. At a sporting goods store I bought a hunting knife. At a clothing store I bought a pair of gloves.

My plan had taken shape with almost no conscious effort, maybe with too little effort. I needed certain conditions for it to work. But I wasn't worried, not really. Events would tell.

After lunch, I packed the mallet and hunting knife and gloves into my overnight bag, along with some towels for filler. I caught a credit-card flight to Cincinnati, checking the bag straight through. Nonstop it wasn't — a change of planes at Pittsburgh, both pilots landing at every airstrip they sighted. By the time we touched down across the river in Kentucky, dusk was closing in on the Ohio River.

The Cincinnati telephone directory, to my surprise, listed not an alias but Harry Regis himself, one Harry Regis only, sandwiched between M. Regiras and Aaron Regner. It listed him just as if The Silencer were an ordinary man in the crowd, a nine-to-five citizen.

His street address, 159 Michaels Lane, meant nothing to me, but I wrote 165 Michaels Lane — close enough, but not too close — on the back of a card and handed it to the cab driver. He smiled at me as if the trip had made his evening.

Harry Regis's house was on a winding residential street far, far away from the airport. No street lamps, no sidewalks, houses dark as sea hulks. I was afraid the driver would have to inquire to find 165, but my luck held, and we caught sight of an illuminated 170 — close enough again. I tapped him on the shoulder and paid him. The fare plus tip took quite a bit of my remaining cash.

The cab left. I put on the leather gloves from the overnight bag and began walking. It was now 8:30, moonless with wisps of fog. I passed three houses that lacked readable numbers. The fourth house said 178. I headed back the other way. After eight or nine houses I spotted 161 posted in reflecting glass numerals, barely visible on an elm tree. One more house, and there it was, a pleasant English Tudor, overspread by an imposing oak. No lights. No gray sedan.

I walked without hesitation up the driveway of 159 and tried the garage door. It was locked, the garage empty. Staying close to the walls, I circled the house, trying the back door, locked, a door to an enclosed porch, also locked, and then the front door, locked.

No time to loiter. I smashed a basement window with my gloved fist and dropped down into a stygian cellar. I brushed away a cobweb, inhaled a musty odor. Ten seconds later, life higher up in the house intruded.

A door opened at the top of the staircase, a shaft of yellow light silhouetted an eye-arresting figure, and I froze. The figure stood there, unmoving, attentive, for ten seconds. Then the door closed, returning me to darkness and apprehension.

I sat down in place and waited. Nothing happened. After half an hour or so, I moved inch by inch toward the other side of the room,

through a door, and eventually found my way to the garage.

Once there I took up a position behind three bales of peat moss. The mallet, still in my overnight bag, was my bet-hedger for a circumstance like this. If Harry Regis turned out to be an honest workingman, he'd have nothing more than a lump on the head to complain about tomorrow. If he proved to be The Silencer, tomorrow meant eternity.

Hours went by. Two, three, four dragging hours. The mallet now lay on the peat moss. I jogged in place to keep my body functioning for the moment of crisis. The wait was becoming worrisome. Dawn I didn't need, a gray sedan I did. But for all I knew Harry Regis had a contract in Phoenix or in Salt Lake City by now.

He didn't.

M-Minute came in the last hour before dawn. I had nearly dozed off on my feet when a blaze of light flooded the back wall of the garage, followed by the overhead door opening and a large car easing in. As the lights passed me, I moved to a spot directly behind the driver's door.

The car stopped.

A half-visible shape rose from the seat, out of the car, and I timed my blow well. The driver's head snapped sideways, his body sagging toward the concrete. I flipped on the garage light, as he himself would have done, and took a brief look at Harry Regis, the

man in my sketch, the man with the vacant yellow eyes, Harry The Silencer, the man who had killed Gail Morrison.

He was my man. Taking the hunting knife from the overnight bag, I stabbed him once in the chest. It was as easy as that. So much for Harry Regis. So much for all predators. The Silencer silenced.

I left through the garage door, shutting it slowly and turning the handle to lock it. I walked back toward Cincinnati, retracing the route my cab driver had taken. Three or four miles later, sweating, shivering, bone-tired, but cheered by the first glint of dawn, I stopped at an all-night diner for coffee and a doughnut.

As I smoked a cigarette, I saw a taxi stop in front of the diner and the driver come in for breakfast. When he had finished, he drove me back to the airport, steering through light traffic into the bloody sunrise, past the brilliant edge of morning.

There were no flights in the direction of Mannville until four o'clock in the afternoon, so I settled down, grimly satisfied, with a newspaper in the waiting room of the terminal. I dozed off.

A little after noon I awoke, ate lunch in the coffee shop, and turned to the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, reading it column by column to pass the time. I had three hours left until take-off when I came across it.

Buried deep within the paper, at the bottom of page 22, I caught sight of a small headline that shook my hands and chilled my heart. *Mobster Charged in Mannville Murder*, it said.

It couldn't say that — it *couldn't*. But it *did*. The text of the dispatch came through to me in a darkening haze.

Mannville (AP) Police in this upstate New York city have charged Arnold Frank of Lodi, New Jersey, a reputed small-time gangster, with the murder of Mrs. Allan Morrison, socialite wife of a Mannville newspaper owner. Jewels valued at thirty-five thousand dollars were recovered in the car Frank was driving. Also found in the car was a .25-caliber automatic pistol, the alleged murder weapon.

I walked, walked, walked in the terminal and outside, trying to concentrate on other times, other places, battles long ago, a so-so general I had been resurrecting for the Department of the Army, a decent artillery sergeant at Cherbourg in World War Two — myself as I had once been. Those far-off days when wars were just, when battles were clearly defined, when the world was young and bright and predictable.

No more. The enemy these days didn't simply stand and fight. If a mugger, he struck like a mad

dog. If a Harry Regis, he thought it out, calculated the odds. It was now clear that Harry Regis, careful contractor that he was, had turned down the Gail Morrison contract after his two run-ins with me. He had told Allan Morrison to hire another gunman for the job. He had gone home to Cincinnati.

Just as surely, Arnold Frank of Lodi, New Jersey, had picked up the contract and executed it. The jewels, the .25 automatic — no mistake about it. The police were holding Gail Morrison's killer. I had done away with the wrong man.

The hedge-hopping flight to Mannville through forming thunderheads turned rough and took an eon. I tried to sleep some more, but couldn't. The stunned, blank face of Harry Regis, a notorious hit man, as Howie had said, but innocent of the crime I had killed him for, glowered sharp and lifelike in my mind's eye, whitening, stiffening, more intrusive as I tried to cancel it from my brain. The ghost of the murdered man, unbidden, unpaying, stayed on the flight, a restless accuser.

A friendly young cab driver in a new Dodge took me back to the Ninth Ward Hotel. The return of George B. McClellan, victorious but in disgrace, very much like his Civil War namesake after the Battle of Antietam. But not cashiered. A soldier of ill-fortune, I could pace for a while

under my *nom de guerre*, think, plan, and try to put the pieces back together again.

I needed a rest. I didn't get it.

It was midnight when I opened the door to my hotel room. The lights were on. I had guests — three men. One, a young, heavy-set stranger with a square jaw and a rumpled brown suit, looked bored. One, a uniformed policeman about my age, looked sad and sheepish. The other, Howard Fitzsimmons, my long-time artillery friend from the U.S. VII Corps, now of the New York City Police Department, looked sharp and professional, a good cop as he really was.

I dropped my overnight bag on the carpet, watchful, curious.

The rumpled man said something to Howie, which I couldn't catch because his lips were hidden behind a cupped hand. Then I saw Howie's lips slowly form the words, "Sorry, Tom."

His fingers started to spell out the other man's message, letter by letter, translating it very quickly into the alphabetic hand-signs I had used with Sandra Weinstein, my wife, Howie and others for the past thirty-five years, ever since going stone deaf, suddenly and forever, during an artillery barrage at Aachen.

"Mr. Chase, you are under arrest for the attempted murder of Harry Regis in Cincinnati, Ohio. You have the right to remain silent...."

The Drexel Site

by WILLIAM A. WARD

Archeology and murder seldom walk hand in hand, but when Tony Barrett was murdered at the big Texas meeting, it was up to his old friend Adrian Haynes to find his killer.

AS CAREERS GO, mine hasn't been what you would call a smashing success. A smashing non-event would be closer. Fate, it seems, has been more than unkind. It's been indifferent — even aloof. At least that's the way I prefer to rationalize the fact that for the last eight years I've been stuck at a second-rate school with the less than euphonious name of South Plains University, which is situated quaintly amid the moon-scape of northwest Texas.

There, I manfully endeavor to teach Anthropology to animated rocks while surrounded by faculty who, from the quality of their lectures and general knowledge of their fields, clearly underwent at some early point in their careers prefrontal lobotomies. I have not, therefore, been in the mainstream. I have, on the contrary, been barely in the eddy.

Despite all that, or maybe because of it, I occasionally like to go to one of the regional symposiums in my field to remind myself that I'm still a member of my profession. It was for that reason that, one dull afternoon in early May, I stopped on my way back

from lunch to read a letter on the departmental bulletin board.

It was from the Director of the Society of Southwestern Archaeology, extending an invitation to all interested faculty to attend a symposium next month at the Playa del Sol Hotel in Galveston. Underneath the letter was an agenda. As I glanced over it I felt my interest definitely aroused when I saw that the main topic for discussion was the Drexel Site and that one of the speakers was Dr. Anthony Barrett of the State Archaeological Commission.

The Commission was a unique creature in that it was a state agency that wasn't full of hacks and political cronies. As a result, it was one of the leading research facilities of its kind in the region, although there were rumors that it had fallen on hard times lately from competition for funding with the State University's research center.

Reinforcing these rumors was the running gun battle between the directors of the two organizations, Harrison Ellis of the Commission and Carter Bryant of the University. It was one of the more

interesting sideshows in our profession.

The discovery of the Drexel Site, however, had given the Commission an enormous boost in prestige. The reason for this was the fact that it was one of those rare but incredibly important discoveries that had managed to set North American archaeology on its ear by pushing back the date of man's known existence in the new world from about twenty thousand years ago to beyond the capabilities of the carbon-14 dating process. This is about fifty thousand years.

It was, without a doubt, one of the truly significant finds of the decade, if not of the century; clearly authenticated evidence that destroyed in one fell swoop all the neat and cherished theories of our trade concerning the appearance of early man in the new world. And one of the men directly involved in that discovery was Tony Barrett, one of the high mullahs of the Commission and also an old friend with whom I'd gone to graduate school.

Tony and I had been fairly close in grad school. We had both been somewhat older than the other students, having taken time out for the army. Tony had been an infantry officer in Viet Nam while I had spent a less glorious but infinitely healthier tour as a supply clerk at Fort Dix, New Jersey. After graduation we went our separate ways and gradually drifted apart.

Several years later, though, I ran into him at a party in Houston. By that time he was with the Commission and insisted that I apply there also. The result was a very condescending turndown from the Director, Harrison Ellis, a notorious curmudgeon, or maybe just cur, who advised me in twenty-five words or less that he received many such applications but, due to the high standards demanded, only those with the very best credentials could be considered.

It was my first lesson in cold reality. It hurt, but one endures.

I had another run-in with Ellis some years later when an article of mine in a regional journal was the subject of subsequently scathing review and denunciation by the dear little man. He seemed to resent my temerity in seeking publication in a journal he, too, used. It was bold of me, I admit.

With all of this in mind, the possibility for something more than the average symposium seemed obvious. After a couple of moments more of looking over the agenda, I decided what the heck. Why not? Besides, it would be an opportunity to see Tony again and do some old fashioned gossiping, not to mention drinking. So, about a month later, I journeyed south toward the balmy promise of Galveston Island.

The balmy promise turned out to be a mini-Miami with huge hotels, overpriced restaurants and

an enormous causeway jammed with traffic trying to get over to the island. There, about a million people, or so it seemed, swarmed in eager anticipation of sunning and sining. Amazing, I thought, as I nosed my way through the traffic toward the Playa del Sol Hotel.

It wasn't hard to find, being right on the beach front. It was set off by itself on the east end of the island — a great steel and glass monolith that arose, aloof and haughty, above the swirling traffic and the sea. The interior confirmed the impression already made, being decorated in varying shades of expensive.

The place was clearly beyond my budget, but that would have been true of almost anywhere else. After checking in, I dumped my suitcase in my room and went downstairs in search of a cold beer and Tony.

As it was nearly seven o'clock, there were a number of people in the bar and restaurant. I took a stool at the bar and looked around, hoping to spot Tony. He wasn't there but I recognized some of the other faces, having seen them peering back at me from professional publications and book jackets. But, as far as I could tell, there wasn't a soul there I knew personally. It made me feel slightly uneasy.

It was about ten minutes later that I saw Tony come in with three other men. As I watched them

walk toward me, I noticed that Tony was beginning to age. He still had the annoying good looks that had made him so appealing to the coeds, one of whom he had married and later divorced.

But there were lines in his face now and his hair was beginning to grey and he looked tired, somehow. But he was still youthfully slim, not fashionably obese like me. Of the other men, I recognized one immediately with his silver hair, his patrician bearing and his otherwise snotty demeanor. It was Harrison Ellis.

"Hello, Tony," I said as they passed.

He looked up and then smiled. It was a tense kind of smile.

"Well, hello, look who's here! How have you been, Adrian?" He seemed nervous as we shook hands. "I've been meaning to get in touch with you, but it's always one thing after another."

"Your indifference to me, Tony, has been a sore point for years," I said, smiling, "but it can be easily remedied by buying me another beer."

He laughed and seemed to relax. "Beer? I remember when it used to be bourbon and water."

"Ah, dissolute youth!" I said and noticed that the other men were growing a bit restless.

"Oh, by the way," Tony said. "These are some of my colleagues at the Commission. Gentlemen, I want you to meet an old college conspirator of mine, Adrian

Haynes. Adrian, this is Paul Betek." He gestured at a grey little man, who nodded crisply and gave me a perfunctory handshake.

"And this is Howard Blakely." He was more of the archetypal Texas — tall, broad shouldered and with the obligatory iron grip.

"And our Director, Harrison Ellis." Ellis smiled thinly and extended a neatly manicured little paw. It was like shaking hands with the Pillsbury dough boy. He looked at me for a moment more, his expression one of barely suppressed contempt.

"Adrian Haynes. Where have I heard that name before? Ah, yes — you applied for a position with us some years back. And I believe we also crossed swords once about an article you wrote. Yes, now I remember. Well, I'm

glad to meet you at last. I think it's really commendable that the Society saw fit to invite representatives from the smaller, lesser known schools." He smiled maliciously.

I smiled sweetly back. "Yes, they felt that in order to satisfy HEW guidelines, they'd have to have a token present."

Tony laughed slightly and for a moment Ellis' little smirk was tinged with something darker and definitely unpleasant. Then his expression faded back into a carefully controlled condescension.

"Well. Well, it's been nice meeting you. Tony, we're going to

have to hurry if we're to get a table."

"Uh, Harrison, you and the others go on. I want to talk to Adrian a little more. Okay?"

Ellis nodded. As they walked away, he gave us both a look full of curiosity and speculation which struck me as somehow odd.

"Like another beer?" Tony said as he seated himself on a stool.

"But of course."

He gestured at the bartender and then fumbled with a cigaret. An awkward silence followed as he puffed, then sipped his beer. "Well it's been about three years since I saw you last," he said finally.

"I believe you're right — much too long. Anyway, I decided to look you up now that you're a famous man and seek some favors."

"Oh, of course," he said and smiled. And then the smile turned to a frown. "Somehow I don't think my doing you a favor would be a favor."

I looked at him, slightly puzzled by his somber expression and tone. "Man speaks in riddles, but I guess that goes with fame."

"I guess." He smiled weakly and sipped his beer.

I knew then that something was wrong. "You don't sound much like a man who's going to be famous."

"I'm sorry Adrian. I guess I'm kind of down. How's everything going at South Plains?"

"Just swimmingly. Listen, Tony, it's none of my business, but is something wrong?"

"Yeah, you could say that." Then, after sipping his glass, he sat there staring at his cigaret.

Suddenly I felt ill at ease. Tony was obviously troubled about something. I wasn't quite sure what to do — whether to keep making small talk or keep probing. Since I'm basically nosy, I decided on the latter.

"Let me see if I can guess what's wrong. You've discovered that Ellis is a close encounter of the third kind."

"That I could handle," he said with a weary sigh.

For several moments more I sat there, quietly watching the bubbles in my beer while Tony puffed on his cigaret and drank with nervous little gulps. I was just about ready to call it quits and excuse myself when, crushing out the cigaret, he said, "I'm really glad to see you, Adrian. I'm awfully glad you showed up."

I thought for a moment he was getting ready to leave, but he didn't move. "We've known each other for a long time, haven't we?"

"I'd say so." I gave him a side-long glance. I could feel that he'd made a decision about telling me something and was now working up to it.

"We were pretty close back in grad school."

"Pretty close." —

"Adrian I...well, something is eating me alive and I don't really know how to handle it. I need to talk it out. I need someone to listen. Someone I know will hold what I tell him in strict confidence. It's a mess, man. I need someone to talk to. Will you help me?"

"Of course. I'll be glad to. You know that. But there's a price. You buy the booze."

"You're on. Listen, I can't talk here. It's too involved, and besides Harrison is watching. I don't want to make him suspicious."

I looked toward the restaurant and, sure enough, Ellis was watching us very intently while the other two were busily stuffing food into their mouths. What the devil was going on, I thought as I looked back at Tony. He had, in the meantime, gotten up from the bar stool.

"Adrian, after I eat, I've got to go to a cocktail party the Directors are giving for some of the...uh... people here."

"You mean the big shots," I said and smiled slightly.

"Yeah, whatever. Anyway, I'll ease out of there after a half an hour or so and meet you at my place around 8:30. I'm in one of those so-called cabanas down by the beach. Number twelve. Don't let me down. I've got to go now. Be there."

I watched him walk toward the

dining room and felt somehow like I should be concealing a microdot in my wrist watch.

II

IT WAS A LITTLE after 8:30 when I wandered down to the beach. What the hotel called cabanas were really expensive-looking beach-houses, each with its own little patio and privacy wall. Wondering if I should knock three times, I tapped on the glass patio door. Tony slid it back and motioned me inside.

"Nice digs," I said as I looked around at the expensive paneling and furnishings. "You're sharing this with Ellis, I guess."

"No, with Betek. Harrison and Blakely are next door. Harrison wouldn't settle for a mere room. The dignity of the Commission and all that. What'll you have?"

"Well, I know it's barbaric, but some bourbon and Dr. Pepper would be nifty."

"You're right. It's barbaric, but have a seat while I fix it, and maybe something a little more traditional for me."

After making the drinks, he handed me mine, and then sat down and looked at me with odd intensity as he swirled the liquid in his glass.

"Well, Adrian, old lad," he said finally, "I think you're going to get your money's worth out of this symposium. It may turn out to be a kind of archaeological Jaws

before its over with." He paused and looked at me with a half-hearted smile. "I guess I'm not making much sense."

"Not much."

"I'm sorry. It's very hard for me to talk about this. I mean it's... well, it's my whole career in the balance. I know now that I've got to talk about this thing before what I think is going to happen, happens." He was talking more to himself than to me.

"Tony, before I lay this handsome cut-glass tumbler beside your head out of sheer exasperation, why don't you just spill it."

For a long moment more, he stared at his drink and then, with a sigh, he said in a soft voice, "The Drexel Site is a hoax."

For several seconds there was absolute silence while we sat there looking at one another. "A what?" I said finally, not believing I had heard right.

"A hoax, Adrian. A fraud. A cleverly constructed hoax by the best little team of scientific con men to come along since the Pilt-down caper."

"Why?" I said, accepting but still not quite believing.

"To save our jobs. To save the dear State Archaeological Commission."

"Go on."

"You've probably...I mean, I guess it's no secret about the feud between the Commission and the University's archaeological research center."

"Even at South Plains we have on occasion heard the distant rumbling of artillery."

"Yeah, well the main reason for that is Carter Bryant of the University. It was about three years ago that he took over their archaeological research facility. Ever since then he's been out to get our projects and our funding. And he's been succeeding. The university's got this thing about being number one, and Bryant's been playing that little tune to any administrator who would listen.

"He must have been playing it right because we suddenly began losing friends in the legislature when funding time came around—also projects. The university's got incredible lobbying power. All they have to do is say, 'We need this to be *numero uno*,' and those politicos fall all over themselves to give it to them. Now they want us, and it was looking like they were going to get us.

"Harrison naturally screamed and yelled, but he was drowned out by the sound of slamming doors. The real crunch came about this time last year when we lost our carbon-14 lab. Can you believe that?

"We were the first ones to have such a thing in this whole region, but it was suddenly decided that the university would be a better place for it. And then we began losing the salvage projects where they were building dams and reservoirs, and also restoration

projects like out at Fort Parker. These were given to Bryant and his boys.

"It didn't take a genius to see we were being phased out in favor of Bryant, and that presented a problem for all of us because the university sure wasn't going to pick us up. It looked like we were going to have to start scratching around for anything we could get. For Harrison, that presented a special problem.

"He'd been bullying and intimidating people for so long, I don't think anyone would have touched him. But what was really rough for him was the fact that, over the last twenty-five years, he had almost singlehandedly built the Commission into one of the best facilities of its kind in the country, and now, suddenly, it was all falling apart. In a way, you can't blame him for what he did — for what we all did."

"The hoax, you mean?"

"Yeah — you want some more bourbon?"

"No, right now. What about the hoax."

He smiled slightly. "I can see you're not going to be sidetracked."

"No way."

"Okay. Well, Harrison was the one who thought of it. He got his inspiration from me, though. I came in after doing a field survey of a surface site on the Drexel Ranch out in West Texas. Wind erosion had exposed a lot of late

Pleistocene material in a box canyon, which turned out to be antelope bones.

"Some of the bones were charred and there was also a very clearly defined layer of other burned material—wood and grass. The animals had apparently been caught in a brush fire that forced them back into the canyon, where they were burned or suffocated to death. I figured the site to be about 75,000 years old. More, maybe.

"I happened to mention in passing to Harrison that it was a shame nobody was around to take advantage of all that cooked meat. He looked at me kind of strangely, then he grabbed me by the arm and dragged me into his office and rounded up Betek and Blakely and told us that he'd figured out a way to save the Commission.

"We would take some of the flint choppers and scrappers in the collection room and salt the site I'd found. The organic material, as it turned out, showed a date in excess of carbon-14. With the tools planted, it made it appear that this was the oldest authenticated site in the new world, pushing the time back forty thousand years and making mush out of the current theories. You know the rest.

"We were suddenly the darlings of North American archaeology and Harrison was in his hey-day. He used every interview,

every cocktail party, every luncheon, to spread the word that the years and money spent in developing the Commission had now paid off, and that it would be foolish to dismantle something unique to satisfy certain institutions and certain individual's ambitions.

"The message got through. There was no way the university or Bryant could touch us now and so they backed off. You may have noticed, by the way, that he and his boys aren't here. I think he'll regret it, but anyway, the money was turned back on again and everything was pretty much back to normal, with Harrison happily accepting plaudits from all over the country."

He paused and drained his glass. "I think I need another. You about ready?"

"In the words of President Sadat, for sure." After I handed him my glass I sat there watching him, seeing the strain and tension on his face while I attempted to digest facts that were incredible. As I did, I tried to imagine what the consequences of his actions would be. They didn't seem to bode well for him.

After handing me my drink, he sat back down. After he lit a cigaret, he sat quietly for a moment watching the smoke curl up around his fingers.

"Well, where was I," he said finally. "Okay, so there we were, sitting pretty again, or so it seemed. You see, I didn't realize

how much attention and publicity this thing was going to generate. Suddenly, we were deluged with invitations to speak from all over the country and Ellis insisted that all four of us pitch in and do it.

"That's where the rub came. When I had to start getting up in front of professional groups — people I respected — and try to lie convincingly. It should have been easy enough. They were certainly willing to believe — God, they were willing to believe! It was the idea of having to do it. I just couldn't stand getting up in front of all those people and lying with conviction about a miserable little fraud.

"It was beginning to tear me apart. I went along with Harrison to save a job I happen to like very much, but I didn't expect to have to go out and run a medicine show. That wasn't part of the deal. I'm a professional, not a fraud. What I did, I did to save something important."

He paused and took a sizeable swallow from his glass. As he did so I studied his face.

"What you're really saying, Tony, is that you wanted to keep the nice little niche you had by means of what you had convinced yourself was a well intentioned fraud — one that would preserve from prowling predators a noble institution along with that comfortable niche — and all without getting your hands dirty. Neat trick."

I had expected to see anger or resentment, but he only smiled his tired little smile. "Yeah, I guess so, Adrian. The tangled web, as it were. And it gets even more tangled. You see, I got so sick and fed up with the whole phoney show-and-tell that I went to Harrison and told him how I felt — that I didn't consider it part of my duties to be a P.R. man for a fraud, whether I was in on it or not. I just wanted to get back full time to my work.

"Well, he wasn't too impressed. He said we were all equally involved and had to share equally in keeping people's interest in the Commission's work positive and satisfied.

"I got ticked off and blew up at him. I told him I couldn't care less any more about what people thought — that I was tired of the whole stinking mess and that I had a good mind to go to the nearest newspaper and spill the whole thing. I didn't mean it. I was upset and tired and just blowing off steam, but he didn't know that.

"For a long moment he just sat there looking at me with a very cold and calculating expression, and I knew then that I'd made a big mistake. Then he told me very calmly that even to think of such a thing was very dangerous for all of us. We all depended, he said, on the loyalty of each other and the destruction of all could never be permitted because of the weakness of one.

"Then he looked me right in the eye and said the others had the right to protect themselves against disloyalty by whatever means and whatever ends necessary. As I looked back at him I suddenly realized that he was threatening me — that he was actually threatening me. I didn't know what to say, I was so amazed. I just got up and left, but ever since then he's been watching me like a hawk.

"I tried telling him I was sorry about blowing up — that I wasn't serious. It didn't have any effect. He doesn't trust me anymore. He only sees me now as some kind of bomb that's going to go off and blow up the whole bloody mess." He paused then and looked at me intently. "Adrian, I think — I really believe — he'd kill to keep what we've done a secret."

For the second time that evening I looked at him with real astonishment. "That's pretty wild, Tony."

"Maybe, but you don't know Harrison. He's an egomaniac and megalomaniac combined. He'd do whatever was necessary to preserve his position. He's already proven that. Lately, his whole attitude toward me has become a kind of subtle cat-and-mouse game. He fairly reeks hostility. He's working himself up to something and I think all he's waiting for is the right place and the right way. That's why I keep this handy."

He got up and walked over to a desk and opened the top drawer and pulled out an army Colt .45 automatic pistol. It looked enormous in the dim lamp light. "I had this in Viet Nam," he said softly as he fondled it. After a few seconds, he put it back and sat down again.

I was more than a little taken aback. "Tony, if you're that worried, then you ought to do something right away — tomorrow."

"That's what I've been trying to work myself up to, Adrian."

He opened a briefcase on the coffee table and took out a manila folder and handed it to me.

"That's why I wrote *this*."

Inside were five neatly typed pages exposing the whole business. I glanced at them and noticed he had signed his name on the last page, almost as if it were a confession or a police statement. Then I handed the folder back.

"What are you planning to do with it?"

"I don't know yet. I'm not sure. That's why I wanted to talk to you. I want to know what you think about this — about what I should do. Is there some other way I could get out of this mess, or do I just bull ahead and get it over with?"

He paused and looked at me expectantly. It was sadly obvious that he was hoping I would manage to come up with some miraculous escape route that would avoid all the messiness of

a straight-out confession. I wasn't able to oblige.

"Tony, I'm sorry, but from where I'm sitting it looks like you've only got one way out, and that's to admit what you've done and take whatever consequences result. You've taken the first step by telling me. Now go on and get it over with, and I'll do what I can for you."

He sighed and then looked at me and smiled. "Well, thanks, Adrian. I appreciate that. I guess it's about time I got it over with. Maybe, by blowing the whistle tomorrow, I can salvage something of my career. Maybe — I don't know. I just know I've got to end this." He paused then and, after a moment, got up. "Well, I appreciate your indulging me. I hope I didn't turn you off too much."

"Not to worry," I said, getting up also. "You're doing the right thing. It'll work out."

"Yeah — well, I hope so. I've got to go check back in on that party for a little bit, to keep Harrison happy — at least through this evening. I've also got to go to the front desk and get something taken care of before tomorrow. But why don't we meet here again at, say, ten o'clock. I've got lots of booze and we can talk about old times, or maybe some of the more creditable work I've been doing. I think you'd be interested, and it would help me get my mind off this."

"You're on," I said and walked to the door.

Tony picked up his briefcase and followed me outside. "See you at ten," he said and moved off toward the main entrance.

I watched him for a few moments as he angled off across the grass, and then I headed back toward the bar. Before I got there, though, I decided that instead of another beer, what I really needed was a shower and a change of clothes. Afterward, I watched an old episode of *Gilligan's Island*. I always lose my head at conventions.

III

IT WAS A LITTLE after ten o'clock when I finally made my way back to Tony's. The lights were on and the sliding glass door was slightly ajar. I started to knock on it when I felt broken glass under my feet. Looking closer, I saw that the glass in the door had been broken out around the lock. As I looked at it, I felt a sudden twinge of apprehension. Pushing back the door, I walked inside. Tony was lying there on the floor. He was on his back, his eyes slightly open. He had been shot twice in the chest.

For a long moment, I stood there looking down at him, not quite believing it. Then I knelt and touched his wrist. He was quite dead. As I knelt there, I noticed something else. His

wristwatch and ring were missing. I then felt beneath him for his wallet. It was also gone.

Getting up, I looked around and saw that a lamp on the desk had been knocked over and a portable typewriter that had been there before was missing, as was a T.V. that had been in the corner. *Oh, good God!* I thought. *He's been killed in some stupid little burglary.* Then I remembered the statement.

His briefcase was on the coffee table as before, and it took only a very short search to determine that the statement was gone. The little folder it had been in was there, but not the statement. I then checked the desk drawers. The gun was still there, but that was all. Suddenly a much grimmer and more plausible possibility developed. It didn't seem likely that a thief would want Tony's statement, but Harrison Ellis would.

I sank down on the arm of the sofa as the realization of what had probably happened sank in. For a minute or so, I sat staring at the folder in the briefcase, not knowing exactly how to react. Then I decided that, before charging out into the night and pointing the bloody finger at Ellis, I'd better think it through first.

It seemed likely that he had killed Tony and then prepared this little charade, but it was also possible that Tony had been killed in just the way it seemed, during

a burglary. He could have changed his mind about blowing the whistle on Ellis and destroyed the statement.

I wasn't too successful in convincing myself, but the fact remained that no real evidence linking Ellis to Tony's existed. Then I got up and, with a sigh, muttered unhappily, "Except for me."

I was seized by a very urgent need to get out of there — to get away from what had happened — to get away from what remained of a friend that now lay like a bag of laundry on the floor — to get away before Betek or somebody else caught me there and implicated me as a suspect. There was also the fact that I definitely needed some time to think the thing out.

I was almost across the patio when another unpleasant thought occurred to me. If Ellis had killed Tony, then what I knew made me a target also, especially if Ellis suspected Tony had confided in me. From the way Ellis had been watching us at the bar, he just might. It was enough of a possibility to make me go back and get Tony's gun. After sticking it into my belt, I buttoned my coat and headed back for the hotel, feeling only slightly absurd.

When I got to my room, I put the gun in the top drawer of the bureau and sank into an easy chair. For several minutes I just sat there, utterly exhausted by

the emotional strain and the shock of what had happened. Gradually, however, as I began to relax, my mind got to work over the unpleasant fact that the job of exposing Ellis as a fraud, possibly as a murderer, was now up to me.

How to do that with no real evidence, however, eluded me and, after a few more minutes of sitting and staring blankly out the window, I decided to go down to coffee shop. There I could wait and watch what happened when Tony was found.

About a half an hour later, things began to happen. I was dawdling over my third cup of coffee and wondering if Ellis had blasted Betek as well, when I saw the flashing red lights racing down toward the beach. A few minutes later, a crowd of onlookers from the hotel had formed outside the beach-house. With some reluctance I decided that I ought to go down there.

After easing my way through the crowd until I could more or less see inside, I noticed several policemen wandering around. And then I saw Ellis. He and his two cronies were talking to a tall, lanky man in plain clothes who looked like a Marine Corps drill instructor.

After a few moments, I eased back through the crowd. As I began to walk back to the hotel, I noticed the lights were on in the beach-house Ellis was renting, and that the patio door was slight-

ly open. I then had a very dumb idea.

The evidence I needed to nail Ellis was the statement, which he had probably destroyed already. In lieu of that, there was the gun he had used to kill Tony. Maybe, just maybe, it was somewhere in there. After making sure that no one was watching, I walked up, pushed the patio door open and went inside.

The first thing I noticed was the faint and unpleasantly sweet aroma of some kind of cologne, and I remembered smelling something similar when I met Ellis earlier. After sliding the door back as I'd found it, I went to work checking the drawers and the closet and the luggage.

I was just going through a small overnight bag full of underwear and socks when I suddenly froze at the very distinctive grating noise the glass door made when it was opened. Slowly, reluctantly, I looked around and saw Ellis standing there looking at me, his expression a montage of disdain, anger and glib amusement.

"I know they don't pay you much, but reduced to stealing underwear — that's tragic. But that's probably not it at all, so why don't you tell me what you're doing in here, rifling my things."

I stood there like an idiot, a pair of boxer shorts in my hand, looking at him and not knowing what to say.

After lighting a cigaret he

looked at me and smiled again. "That's not much of an answer, Dr. Haynes. I tell you what. I think I'll just get the policeman next door to ask you that question. He might be very interested in what you're doing in here, in view of what's happened."

He turned to leave and I decided what to do very quickly. "That would be unwise, Dr. Ellis," I said, trying very hard to sound calm and assured.

He turned and looked at me, his shrewed little eyes making a very careful assessment. "Indeed?"

"Oh very definitely — because then I'd have to tell him about the long conversation I had with Tony earlier this evening. Also about the statement he wrote accusing you of having created a hoax known as the Drexel Site, which you and he and those other two characters have been palming off as a great discovery. He might also wonder why it's now missing, and why a sneak thief would want such a thing."

As I talked, I had the enormous pleasure of seeing Ellis' aplomb wither. His hand with the cigaret stopped halfway to his mouth as he listened with obvious astonishment, and I knew I'd hit the bullseye.

Then, with a kind of exaggerated casualness he walked over to the lamp table and crushed out his cigaret in the ashtry. In those few seconds, he rallied and

reasserted his smooth, supercilious facade.

"That's an amazing accusation, Dr. Haynes. You have some kind of proof, do you?"

"Thanks to you, no."

"I see. Of course. Now, I don't know what you're up to my dreary little friend, whether you're trying to commit character assassination out of resentment born of our earlier encounters or if it's just the normal progress of dementia praecox. But this absurd accusation of yours is one that will get you into a great deal of trouble if you ever make it." He was all outrage and menace now.

"Let me be more specific. If you ever — ever — repeat what you have just said, I'll go after you like a hound out of hell. After I sue you for everything you've got, which in your case would probably be no more than that seedy suit you're wearing, I'll see to it, tenure or no tenure, that you're terminated at that third-rate mill you work in. I'll also make sure that no one else will touch you. I can and I will. Try me. Now get out of here!"

With as much dignity as I could salvage, I walked past him, then paused in the doorway and said with what could only be called failing bravado, "It's not third rate, Harrison, it's second rate. I take pride in my school."

As I walked by to the hotel, the anger I felt began to cool. In its place came the very unsett-

ling realization that I had just turned myself into an animated target. *Terrific!* I thought grimly.

AFTER A LESS THAN easy night's sleep, I woke up about nine o'clock, only marginally alive. Dressed, I went downstairs and, as I passed the front desk, I noticed a large, hand-printed poster which announced that the opening of the symposium had been postponed until one o'clock in memory of Dr. Anthony Barrett. I paused for a moment and looked at it. It was hard to believe that such a thing should be necessary only twelve hours after we had first run into one another in the bar.

I walked on to the coffee shop and was about to go in when Ellis and his two cronies came out. Ellis looked up at me and, for a brief unpleasant moment, our eyes met. With the possible exception of a drill sergeant at Fort Leonardwood, Missouri, I received the most menacing glare I could recall.

I could almost see his malignant little mind working over the problem I presented. I then averted my eyes and went on past them. If looks could kill . . . I thought.

After buying the local paper, I took a seat at the counter. Not having any appetite, I just ordered coffee. As I sipped it, I glanced through the paper, Tony's murder was big news, and there was a large picture of the lanky Marine-

Corps-looking policeman I had seen last night staring intently at something in the sand, which, I decided, was a snowcone cup.

The picture of the policeman, however, brought jarringly back into mind the fact that I had to make some sort of decision about what to do. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that my options were extremely few. I could run back to South Plains and try to forget what I knew and hope that Ellis would do the same and not pay me a visit some dark and stormy night. I could, like a little soldier, march myself down to the police and tell them what I thought had happened and then watch while Ellis eviscerated me professionally. Or I could run away to sea.

The last was the most appealing, except for the single drawback that they were probably not taking thirty-six-year-old cabin boys these days. I sighed and drained my coffee cup. The decision came quickly, if painfully. I hoped the desk sergeant was in a good mood, and heaved myself up. "*Carthago delenda est,*" I muttered and received a cold stare from the man next to me.

With a mood approaching the suicidal, I walked slowly back down the hall, working out what I was going to say to the police. As I went past the entrance to the auditorium, I noticed that a long table had been set up with a pile of handouts and pamphlets on

it, all neatly stacked in preparation for the opening of the symposium.

After looking over some of them, I glanced up at a large sign taped to the wall which requested that those needing to make Xerox copies for handouts to please leave their material with the desk clerk at least two hours before they were needed.

I started to go on, then stopped and looked up at the sign again as something amorphous stirred in the back of my mind — something about Tony. At first it wouldn't jell — then it hit me — the something that Tony had had to get taken care of before today. The something he had gone to the front desk for last night — and he had had his briefcase with him — and the statement was in the briefcase.

He had taken it to be Xeroxed. "*Great God in heaven!*" I fairly bellowed, then turned and raced down the hall to the front desk, where a young woman gave me a startled look.

"Yes, sir — can I help you?"

"Do you have some Xeroxed materials for Dr. Anthony Barrett?"

She looked under the desk for a moment and then pulled out a large stack of neatly stapled Xerox copies. I grabbed the one off the top and looked at it. It was Tony's statement. And as I looked at it, I felt the kind of exhilaration generally reserved for those who

inherit a million dollars — tax free.

"Where's the original?" I asked after a moment.

"I guess he took it with him. The girl on duty probably made a copy to run these with. That'll be \$36.75, with tax."

For several moments I didn't say anything. I just stared down at the stack, reveling in the thought that Ellis was mine.

"Sir?"

"What? Oh! Child, it's a bargain." I handed her two twenties and, after getting my change, grabbed the stack and charged away toward the elevator.

On the way up, I went over what I was going to say to the sheriff as I clutched my prize. "Poor old Ellis," I chuckled. "To be brought down by a cluck from South Plains U."

When I got to my room, I went in and, slamming the door, rushed over to the bureau and set the stack down. Then I glanced up at the mirror and froze. There was another reflection there besides my own. It was Ellis.

He was all poise and sneer. "You took your time. I've been waiting in this cell of yours for God knows how long."

"What are you doing here? How'd you get in?" The shrillness in my voice and my expression must have mirrored fairly accurately the shock and surprise I felt. It seemed to amuse Ellis.

"Now, now — musn't panic.

One thing at a time. I came up, hoping to intercept you before you worked up enough courage to call the police. You weren't here, however, but the maid was. So I just walked in, took off my coat and pretended to be you, bizarre as that seemed. She never suspected a thing. Stupid creature. Anyway, here we are. Awkward, isn't it?" He smiled again.

I decided this was not the time for clever repartee. Turning around, I reached into the top drawer of the bureau and pulled out the gun that thankfully was still there. I then turned and pointed it at Ellis. He was distinctly unimpressed.

"Oh, I've seen that already. I found it when I was rummaging around, waiting for you. Those things are dangerous to leave lying around. Small children or fat, dull men might hurt themselves. That's why I took this out." He reached in his coat pocket and pulled out the magazine and held it up.

I looked down at the grip and saw the magazine was gone.

"Frustrating, isn't it?" he said as he put the magazine back in his pocket, and then pulled out a very unpleasant looking revolver. "These are so much more reliable."

"Another robbery?" I said as a feeling of grim resignation began to seep over me.

"I'm afraid so. It's a stigma of our times." He walked toward me, stopping about four feet away and looked past me at the stack of copies on the bureau. "My, my! What have we here? Why, I believe those are copies of Tony's statement! I hadn't thought of that possibility. Wasn't that clever of you! I certainly appreciate your bringing them up."

"There was a soft click, and I saw that he had cocked the hammer of the gun.

"How did you know about the report?" I said, trying very hard to buy some time.

"Oh, I found it after I'd killed Tony. I thought I'd better rummage through his papers to see what was there. It was a good thing, don't you agree? No, probably not. Well, I hate to shoot and run, but I have to meet with the Society Directors about filling Tony's spot on the agenda. Tragic business!" He then paused and smiled grimly at me. "Well, ready to find out if your maker will claim you?

All the time he was talking, I had been trying to think of something to do besides standing there and letting him shoot me, but nothing came. Then I remembered something, something prompted by the gnawing frustration of standing there holding a useless gun — something I had learned in that unpleasant little interval I'd spent in the army long ago.

It was a small, thin chance. On the surface it seemed little better than throwing the gun at him, but it was also the only thing that seemed to offer any kind of hope. So I did it. I raised the gun and pointed it at the center of Ellis' chest, flipped the safety off and pulled the trigger. My hand jerked and a spurt of flame and smoke erupted from the barrel accompanied by an incredible explosion.

When the gun actually went off, I was almost as surprised as Ellis, but not quite. The impact of the bullet knocked him backward against the wall. As he slid down to the floor with a terrible wound in his chest, his expression was one of utter astonishment. It faded very quickly into the much grimmer one of death.

What I had remembered and what Ellis had overlooked was the possibility that Tony might have chambered a round after he put the magazine in, so that the gun would be ready to fire the instant it was needed. Removing the magazine had extracted all the weapon's teeth but one. I was very grateful for that.

The hotel, however, was not at all happy with me for having created another unpleasantness, and the Society's Directors were also peeved for my having made a shambles of their symposium, not to mention their main speaker. The police, too, were less than ecstatic and I was hustled off

to the police station and made to tell my story over and over again while a man from the District Attorney's Office listened.

As he listened, he looked over the copy of Tony's statement as well as the girl's statement identifying Tony as the one who had ordered the copies. These, along with the ballistics report on Ellis' pistol led to a decision by the District Attorney's Office that, based on the evidence, they wouldn't charge me or send it to the grand jury, since it would only result in my being nobbled, as they wouldn't press for an indictment.

So I was released and taken back to the hotel by a young officer who told me that Ellis' two cronies had been questioned and then released, and were last seen heading out of town at a high rate of speed. They would probably turn up on the faculty of South Plains U., I thought, smiling slightly at the incongruity.

After I got back to the hotel, I collected my suitcase, which had been removed to the front desk and, after paying my bill, headed for my car.

"There is no way," I told myself as I walked across the parking lot, "that I will ever go to another symposium. Jogging on the freeway during rush hour, possibly. But no more symposiums."

Then, after crossing over the causeway, I headed north toward home and good old South Plains U.

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The Same Old Grind

by BILL PRONZINI

Mitchell thought Old Man Giftholz was a jerk — which wasn't quite the case.

THERE WERE NO customers in the Vienna Delicatessen when Mitchell came in at two on a Thursday afternoon. But that wasn't anything unusual. He had been going there a couple of times a week since he discovered the place two months ago, and he hadn't seen more than a dozen people shopping there in all that time.

It wasn't much of a place. Just a little hole-in-the-wall deli tucked down at the end of a side street, in an old neighborhood that was sliding downhill. Which was exactly the opposite of what he himself was doing, Mitchell thought. He was heading *uphill* — out of the slums he was raised in and into this section of the city for a few months, until he had enough money and enough connections, and then uptown, where the living was easy and you drank champagne instead of cheap

bourbon and ate in fancy restaurants instead of dusty old delis.

But he had to admit that he got a boot of coming to the Vienna Delicatessen. For one thing, the food was good and didn't cost much. For another, the owner, Giftholz, amused him. Giftholz was a frail old bird who talked with an accent and said a lot of humorous things because he didn't understand half of what you rapped to him about. He was from Austria or someplace like that, had been in this country for thirty years, but damned if he didn't talk like he was just off the boat.

What Giftholz was doing right now was standing behind the deli counter and staring off into space. Daydreaming about Austria, maybe. Or about the customers he wished he had. He didn't hear Mitchell open the door, but as soon as the little bell overhead started tinkling, he swung around

and smiled in a sad hopeful way that always made Mitchell think of an old mutt waiting for somebody to throw him a bone.

"Mr. Mitchell, good afternoon."

Mitchell shut the door and went over to the counter. "How's it going, Giftholz?"

"It goes," Giftholz said sadly. "But not so well."

"The same old grind, huh?"

"Same old grind?"

"Sure. Day in, day out. Ruts-ville, you dig?"

"Dig?" Giftholz said. He blinked as if he was confused and smoothed his hands over the front of his clean white apron. "What will you have today, Mr. Mitchell?"

"The usual. Sausage hero and an order of cole slaw. Might as well lay a brew on me too."

"Lay a brew?"

Mitchell grinned. "Beer, Giftholz. I want a beer."

"Ah! One beer, one sausage hero, one cole slaw. Yes."

Giftholz got busy. He didn't move too fast — hell, he was so frail he'd probably keel over if he tried to move fast — but that was all right. He knew what he was doing and he did it right — lots of meat on the sandwich, lots of slaw. You had to give him that.

Mitchell watched him for a time. Then he said, "Tell me something, Giftholz. How do you hang in like this?"

"Please?"

"Hang in," Mitchell said. "Stay in business. You don't have many customers and your prices are already dirt cheap."

"I charge what is fair."

"Yeah, right. But you can't make any bread that way."

"Bread?" Giftholz said. "No, my bread is purchased from the bakery on Union Avenue."

Mitchell got a laugh out of that. "I mean money, Giftholz. You can't make any *money*."

"Ah! Yes, it is sometimes difficult."

"So how do you pay the bills? You got a little something going on the side?"

"Something going?"

"A sideline. A little numbers action, maybe?"

"No, I have no sideline."

"Come on — everybody's got some kind of scam. I mean, it's a dog-eat-dog world, right? Everybody's got to make ends meet any way he can."

"That is true," Giftholz agreed. "But I have no scam. I do not even know the word."

Mitchell shook his head. Giftholz probably didn't have a scam. It figured. One of these old-fashioned merchant types who were dead honest. And poor as hell because they didn't believe in screwing their customers and grabbing a little gravy where they could.

But still, the way things were these days, how did he stand up to

the grind? Even with his cheap prices, he couldn't compete with the big chain outfits in the neighborhood that had specials and drawing and gave away stamps — and he had to pay higher and higher wholesale prices himself for the stuff he sold. Yet here he was, still in business. Mitchell just couldn't figure out how guys like him did it.

Giftholz finished making the sandwich, put it on a paper plate, laid a big cup of slaw beside it, opened a beer from his small refrigerator and put everything down on the counter. He was smiling as he did it — a kind of proud smile, as if he had done something fine.

"It is two dollars, please, Mr. Mitchell."

Two dollars. Man! The same meal would have cost him four or five at one of the places uptown. Mitchell shook his head again, reached into his pocket, and flipped his wallet out.

When he opened it and fingered through the thick roll of bills inside, Giftholz's eyes got round. Probably because he'd never seen more than fifty bucks at one time in his life. Hell, Mitchell thought, give him a thrill. He opened the wallet wider and waved it under Giftholz's nose.

"That's what real money looks like, Giftholz," he said. "Five bills here, five hundred aces. And plenty more where that came from."

"Where did you earn so much money, Mr. Mitchell?"

Mitchell laughed. "I got a few connections, that's how. I do little jobs for people and they pay me big money."

"Little jobs?"

"You don't want me to tell you what they are. They're private jobs, if you get my drift."

"Ah!" Giftholz said, and nodded slowly. "Yes, I see."

Mitchell peeled off the smallest of the bills, a fiver, and laid it on the counter. "Keep the change, Giftholz. I feel generous today."

"Thank you. Thank you so much."

Mitchell laughed again and took a bite of his hero. Damned good. Giftholz made the best sandwiches in the city, all right. How could you *figure* a guy like him?

He ate standing up at the counter. There was one little table against the back wall, but from here he could watch Giftholz putter around in slow motion. Nobody else came into the deli. He would have been surprised if somebody had.

When he finished the last of the hero and the last of the beer, he belched in satisfaction and wiped his hands on a napkin. Giftholz came over to take the paper plate away. Then he reached under the counter and came up with a bowl of mints and a small tray of toothpicks.

"Please," he said."

"Free mints? Since when, Giftholz?"

"It is because you are a good customer."

It is because I gave you a three-buck tip, Mitchell thought. He grinned at Giftholz, helped himself to a handful of mints, and dropped them into his coat pocket. Then he took a toothpick and worked at a piece of sausage that was stuck between two of his teeth.

Giftholz said, "You would do me a small favor, Mr. Mitchell?"

"Favor? Depends on what it is."

"Come with me into the kitchen for a moment."

"What for?"

"There is something I would show you."

"Like what?"

"It is something of interest. Please, it will only take a short time."

Mitchell finished excavating his teeth, tucked the toothpick into a corner of his mouth and shrugged. What the hell, he might as well humor the old guy. He had time. He didn't have any more little jobs to do today. And there wouldn't be any gambling or lady action until tonight.

"Sure," he said. "Why not."

"Good. *Wunderbar!*"

Giftholz gestured for him to come around behind the counter and then doddered through a door into the kitchen. When Mitchell went through after him, he didn't

see anything particularly interesting. Just a lot of kitchen equipment, a butcher's block table, a couple of cases of beer, and some kind of large contraption in the far corner.

"So what do you want to show me?" he asked.

"Nothing," Giftholz said.

"Huh?"

"Really I would ask you a question."

"What question?"

"If you speak German."

"German? You putting me on?"

"Putting you on?"

For some reason, Mitchell was beginning to feel short of breath.

"Listen," he said, "what do you want to know a thing like that for?"

"It is because of my name. If you were to speak German, you see, you would understand what it means in English translation."

Short of breath and a little dizzy, too. He blinked a couple of times and ran a hand over his face. "What do I care what your damned name means."

"You *should* care, Mr. Mitchell," Giftholz said. "It means 'poison wood'."

"Poison...?" Mitchell's mouth dropped open, and the toothpick fell out of it and fluttered to the floor. He stared at it stupidly for a second.

Poison wood...

Then he stopped feeling dizzy and short of breath. He stopped feeling anything. He didn't even

feel the floor when he fell over and hit it with his face.

Giftholz stood looking down at the body. Too bad, he thought sadly. Ah, but then, Mr. Mitchell had been a *strolch*, a hoodlum. Such men were not to be mourned. As he had said himself in his curious idiom, it was a dog-eat-dog world today. Everything cost so much. Everything was so difficult for a man of honesty. One truly did have to make ends meet any way one could.

He bent and felt for a pulse. But of course there was none. The poison paralyzed the muscles of the heart and brought certain death within minutes. It also, as he well knew, became neutralized in the body after a short period

of time, leaving no toxic traces.

Giftholz picked up the special toothpick from the floor, carried it over to the garbage pail. After which he returned and took Mr. Mitchell's wallet and put it away inside his apron.

One had to make ends meet any way one could. Such a perfect phrase that was. But there was another of Mr. Mitchell's many phrases which still puzzled him. The same old grind. It was *not* the same old grind; it had not been the same old grind for some time.

No doubt, Mr. Mitchell meant something else, Giftholz decided.

He began to laboriously drag the body toward the large gleaming sausage grinder in the far corner.



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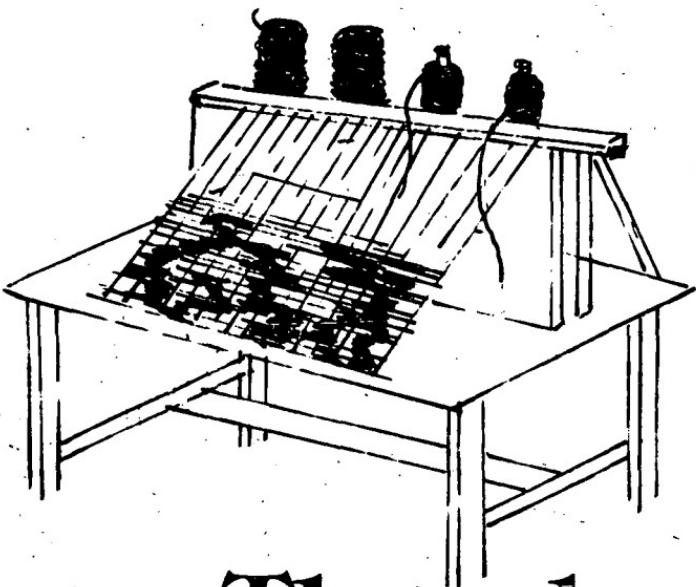
THE LADY MUST LIVE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

AND

MURDER TAKES A WORLD CRUISE

BY CHARLES VENTURA



Loose Threads

by BLAINE G. RYAN

If Veteran Chicago cop Owen Bagnell had not learned how to crochet, he would never have solved his landlady's murder.

AT SIX A.M. Owen Bagnell, Chicago PD (Homicide), punched out the cheap alarm clock and hit the floor feet first. He promptly collapsed. It was going to be a rotten Wednesday.

He lay on the crumpled heap of bedding next to his wife and tried

to focus on spidery cracks in the plaster ceiling. They weren't getting any worse as far as he could tell, which was more than he could say for the lines around his brown eyes. At thirty-five his body felt as if it was running its last lap to retirement. He knew

it, and it was depressing.

His right hand groped around the nightstand next to his pillow for a pack of Winstons and didn't find any. He dimly recalled that he was quitting. *Quit*. Miss Pawlowski, his landlady, kept telling him so. "Put the money into a hobby, Lieutenant Bagnell," she had said quietly. Owen had felt four feet tall and six years old. So he had. In fact, he had a canvas taped, blocked out and just waiting to be filled in with color. The only shade it had so far was grey — *dust* grey.

His hand disentangled itself from the grimy lamp cord belonging to a smug-looking owl with a pleated white shade over its pointy ears and knocked over a glass ashtray stamped *Harrah's*. It fell on the battered face of the clock. He tried to swear at it but couldn't find the energy. Screaming meemies itched their way up his throat.

Maria rolled off the bed and trotted into the bathroom with more spring in her step than Owen thought any human had a right to. He mentally made a note to put in for vacation early, like next week. Florida — everybody goes to Florida — and he decided they should too.

This latest case had been dumped in his lap like a last year's Easter egg, and it smelled. Another very dead female teenager deposited in one of the many forest preserves that scatter them-

selves around "Chicagoland." The murderer hadn't waited for a receipt, so Monday's girl had worn a snow coat until a cross-country skier unzipped her.

About the time Owen resolved to peel himself off the bed, Maria initiated the breakfast-ritual with an enthusiastic clash of pots and pans. He had second thoughts and ran his hand through the ruffled thatch of mousy brown hair over his forehead.

He wanted oatmeal, hot, with lots of cholesterol-saturated butter and piles of brown sugar. He knew he wouldn't get it. Instead, he'd face another neat little mound of Ah Hei steamed eggs that looked like foam rubber pillow and tasted about the same.

For some reason he had never figured out, Maria had become involved with Oriental cooking to the point of obsession and had sworn to perfect this recipe if it killed her. Owen felt she intended homicide more than suicide, but continued to choke down the pillows regularly in deference to her volcanic Italian temper.

Eventually he made it to the kitchen, dressed, with a pair of steel-toed brown shoes swinging limply in his left hand. "What is it?" he asked.

Maria overended a little bowl onto a plate. "Ah Hei," she said.

"Ah," he said as tonelessly as he could. She could infer more meaning from a simple syllable than most people could

squeeze out of three semesters on Shakespeare's sonnets.

She reached across the kitchen table that had skinny metal legs and a plastic coat and put the eggs in front of him. A long strand of her wavy black hair swept across her mouth. She had a wide mouth, naturally red and inviting. She speared a piece of his mound and tasted it.

"Almost," she announced. Bagnell privately concluded the end was in sight and grinned. He had a good set of teeth despite the fact he never went to the dentist and wasn't self-conscious about an obviously chipped incisor that had gotten that way bouncing off the butt-end of a .38.

Her return smile was like sunshine through cloud cover and it made him feel a whole lot better about the world in general.

At five to seven, he kissed those inviting lips. She pushed him out the door and said, "Don't forget bridge tonight with Ben and Claire."

Owen slapped his battered tweed hat on his head. It made his ears stick out. "You're not bringing munchies, I hope," he said. He didn't think his partner Ben Varma, or his wife for that matter, could stick out a plate of refried noodles or some other horrid concoction with rubbery strips of black fungus and tough little dried shrimp that didn't resurrect when soaked in water.

Maria's olive skin took on a rosy



glow and her eyes began to smolder like hot coals. Owen beat a hasty retreat down the steps, and his shoes made a racket, thumping noise that didn't drown out the bang of the door.

The Bagnells lived in a brick three-flat in the Montrose area of metropolitan Chicago, one of those "communities within communities" that used to have ethnic and religious solidarity. Montrose had once been German and Slavic. Now it was a mishmash, and only some of the older establishments like Lutz's Viennese Coffee House remained.

The building itself was as solid as a fort with even less personality. Thousands of such apartments dotted Chicago and its suburbs. Builders even built new ones just as solid, just as ugly, just as homey as the ones that had sprung up in the early '20's.

They were good places to raise kids. The flats were roomy and they had hardwood floors that

didn't hurt too much when a kid fell and bonked his head. The Bagnells didn't have any kids. Owen didn't have time to think about it much.

Conventionally, only two floors were aboveground. The third was a converted basement, generally occupied by the owner. This arrangement had given rise to a certain joke of an ethnic nature having to do with the low suicide rate of basement inhabitants, who somehow never caught on to the trick of falling up. Miss Pawlowski would not have been amused.

Owen and Maria had the top flat, number three. Two, below, was vacant. It had been rented since Day One by an old character named Samuel Chlapecka, who had a grand piano, not much else, and who played Chopin eighteen hours a day. Chlapecka had been eighty-three when he passed along to the great conservatory in the sky.

Miss Pawlowski had lamented considerably, not least because because he had been a reliable, paying tenant. She was afraid of who and what the next one would be. The Bagnells had felt sorry and relieved at the same time. By the time he had died they loathed pianos and Chopin in particular.

At seven sharp, Owen met Miss Pawlowski coming up the front walk. This elderly lady had two abiding manias: needlepoint and fresh air. She had a lot of time for

both since she'd retired from the Bohemian bakery a few blocks away. Snow or shine, she trotted around the block three times before breakfast and kept her flat at a frigid fifty degrees.

The windchill on Owen's nose was minus five. It could get a lot colder, and he hoped it wouldn't.

Miss Pawlowski's cheeks were as pink as strawberry sherbet and her Official Chicago Bears knit cap pushed her white hairs around her face like swirls of whipped cream. She also wore gloves, felt-lined boots and a coat that was a shapeless black heap of fine wool over a blue lining. It could have been one year or twenty years old, but if Owen had had to guess, he would have picked the older number.

She was short and dumpy and kind of cute, like everybody's grandmother. She looked up at him and said crisply, "Good morning, Lieutenant Bagnell. Kicked the habit?"

The fuzzy, ridiculous pompon bobbed rhythmically, like a little prompting ball bouncing over the words of *The Beer Barrel Polka*.

"Yes," Owen lied. A friend who was a priest had once told him that to commit a deed in thought was no better than committing it in reality. By this time, Owen had committed an entire pack. "How is your Panamanian parrot coming along?" he asked quickly.

It had been an enormous piece of needlepoint, nearly life size

and rendered in photographic detail. The only thing she could have missed was the smell.

She sniffed. "Done with, done with. Today I am starting a new piece based on a tenth-century Seljuk mosaic. Very quick — over five, over three, repeat," she explained. "My niece, Penelope Wiciak, has mentioned something about getting married to a foreigner, an Italian I believe."

She said *Italian* as though the word would give her some foul disease and tried to look down her nose and up at Bagnell at the same time. She had made a great effort to forget Maria was nee Bianucci and had apparently succeeded.

Owen failed to see the connection between her niece, an Italian and a pillow that would look like a bunch of bricks. He did know that his landlady had the fastest needle in the city — he'd lay money on it — so if it was going to be a wedding present, the affair would be coming up very shortly. He bet himself a box of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups that Maria would fill him in on the details.

She went on, "Penelope and this Manfredo are coming to see me this evening. Perhaps you and Maria would like to come down and meet them?" She blocked his escape like one of the men on the Task Force and he had a feeling she wanted him to give the fiance the third degree right there in her refrigerated flat.

He hadn't met Manfredo, didn't want to meet Manfredo, but felt sorry for him if Miss Pawlowski's niece was anything like her aunt. That sort of woman would have a pair of velvet gloves and carry a whip and a leash at the same time.

He smiled woodenly and apologized with the same tone he usually reserved for official expressions. "We've got bridge tonight."

She stepped aside. "Pity. Well, have a good day, Lieutenant. We are all dependent on you."

With that dismal exhortation crawling in his numbed ears, he went down the walk toward the hole-in-the-wall newsstand across the street, where he always waited for Ben to give him a lift downtown.

The snow was poorly shoveled because the kid who was supposed to do it didn't want to and his mother made him do it because a cousin of hers was distantly related to Miss Pawlowski's brother. Or something. The snow didn't get shoveled. It crept under his pants legs and into his shoes.

He reached the curb and squeezed between two parked cars that were rust-to-rust wrong way along the street. One of them hadn't been moved since the first snowfalls, and the way it was buried it was unlikely it would get out until July.

The slush in the middle of the

street was as deep as it was on the sides, only slicker. The snowplows couldn't get down to clear it off because of the cars parked densely on either side. The city planners who had been out for a buck a long time ago had made the streets narrow.

The people in the neighborhoods complained bitterly about the situation every year and parked their cars there every year. Bagnell kept a car downtown at the headquarters lot, drove it around occasionally on principle, then put it back to nest. Maria didn't know how to drive.

He squirmed between the autos on the other side of the street, got a smear of oil on his coat that looked as if it had been painted on with a large brush, swore, then stepped in a hole in the snow.

He pulled his foot out and limped over to the newsstand, trying not to let the ice under his heel slide down to his toes, which were already half frozen. He leaned against a stack of *Tribunes* that headlined the latest murderer . . . again.

Their motto being, a dogfight on Clark Street is more important than a war in the Balkans (or the Middle East). The latest diplomatic fiasco there would be on page ten, maybe, tucked between a Marshall Field ad and an editorial on sewage. He took off his shoe and wiped it out with his gloved hand.

The owner of the pile of papers, Cernauskas, was a heavy grey-haired man. Bagnell didn't know his first name. Cernauskas was Lithuanian, anyway. This was his thirtieth anniversary in that dingy closet, and Owen thought he must make a living because he wasn't getting any thinner.

"Regular?" Cernauskas palmed a box of Winstons from the wall of cigarettes. The box disappeared in his hand.

"Naw," Owen growled. He suspected he was making a terrible mistake. He put his shoe back on and had to take off his gloves to tie the laces.

Varma pulled up in his new LTD. It was supposed to be black but you couldn't tell because of the salt scuzz. It looked as if it had a bad case of the scabs. Owen avoided the hole, put another smear on his coat and got in. A couple of months ago the floor rugs had been nice. Now they looked as if the swamp had taken over and smelled dank. There were puddles under his partner's feet.

Ben Varma was just a shade smaller than a billboard, mostly muscle running to desk fatigue. He had blond hair abandoning his hairline, pale blue eyes that didn't need glasses and a nose that had been unfixed too many years ago to count. Next to him Owen always felt like a terrier with a Great Dane. They got along just fine.

By mutual consent, they never spoke until they got to the Congress Parkway. At that point Varma finished his third Benson and Hedges menthol and looked at his rider.

"Whatsa matter? You look a little green around the gills." His voice was surprisingly soft.

Owen gave him a look of pure anguish. "Cold turkey."

"What?"

"Cigaretts. I've quit."

Varma's eyes did three-sixties.

"Geez! Do me one favor, Pal — skip the Crusader Rabbit routine."

On the whole, Owen felt more like Goofy or Grumpy. He couldn't decide which.

According to his worst expectations, Wednesday was the pits. There was a team meeting at ten. The captain outlined what they had so far. About zilch. Nobody had come up with any bright ideas, any connections. Like the victims being cousins fourteen times removed. Nothing washed, and the investigators left with an official admonition to dig deeper and keep the ears open. Right!

Otherwise known as "the stall" until some other pretty got hers and the murderer was kind enough, or sloppy enough, to leave a clue they could get on. Who would be next? Perhaps a nice redhead, with lots of friends who last saw her get on a bus on Irving Park. Wonderful! Bagnell felt like throwing up.

For some reason, nobody at City Hall ever cared to give (they could give a lot of wrong reasons for a lot of wrong things but never a right reason for what mattered), the traffic was screaming horror on the Kennedy Expressway. One lane at a time had been blocked off and cars dribbled through in a trickle. It took the LTD a half an hour to get three miles. It was late when Ben dropped Bagnell off in front of his flat.

He had to back out because the street was barricaded by a square orange-and-white monster of an ambulance. A group of anonymous people, wrapped to the eyeballs, stood in a knot in front of his steps and whispered into each other's mufflers. A light snow was beginning to fall.

Owen got out and wondered what the hell was going on. Whatever it was, he had a feeling it was going to make him irritated. He was wrong. Maria untied herself from the knot of people and wanted to run up to him. She made it in jerky little hops.

"Oh, *Owen!* It's Miss Pawlowski. *She's dead!*" Maria's face was pale over her red scarf. Owen was stunned. He'd sooner believe Gibraltar had been crushed for gravel.

"What happened?"

Maria shook her head, sending waves of black hair flying. "I don't know. I think her niece and her boyfriend found her. That's them, over there."

She indicated a plain woman, solidly built and about twenty-eight. She wore a nicely tailored brown coat the same color as her hair, which was permed so tightly she probably had to send it to a furrier to be cleaned.

At the moment, she was stamping her boots to keep the blood flowing. The boots had ridiculously high heels, and Owen wondered how women expected to walk in them without breaking their necks on the ice. Maybe some of them did.

The niece was standing next to a dark skinned, dark haired man of indeterminate age who had a nose like a razor, thin lips and eyes like onyx marbles. He was wearing a black fur coat that fell to his knees and had a black fur collar. At the end of the sleeves Owen could see cufflinks that were gold with little green flecks of stone.

The man would have been taller than the girl by an inch if she hadn't been wearing the boots. He didn't like them, and he kept staring at her feet with an expression that said he would rip them off and toss them into the lake at the first opportunity.

The two of them didn't speak and watched the ambulance attendants wheel the shrouded stretcher into the wagon. The doors closed like a bank vault. Maria faded away and went back upstairs. Bagnell walked over and introduced himself.

Penelope Wiciak stared at him sourly. Manfredo Rialto didn't look at him at all.

"You with the police?" she snapped. "The other guy got it all." She nodded toward the patrol officer who was trying to get the kibbitzers moving.

"Yes," Bagnell replied, "but my wife and I live in the top flat. You don't know how sorry I am about your aunt," he added quietly.

She decided to be polite. "Thank you," she said. Owen could tell it was an effort.

"Could you just give me an outline?" he asked. She looked at her boyfriend but he had sent his brain on a round-the-world vacation, and wherever he was he didn't seem to be having a good time.

Miss Wiciak grimaced and glanced at the ambulance as it slowly pulled away. "I did some shopping at Lord & Taylors, picked up Manfredo in front of the Wrigley Building and drove out here. We got here about five-thirty. We were going to take her out to dinner — surprise her."

Surprise is right, Owen thought. "She mentioned you were coming this morning," he said.

She looked surprised and Manfredo woke up. "Oh. Really?" Miss Wiciak said. It came out slowly, cautiously, as if she wanted a notarized transcript. It wasn't forthcoming.

"Please, go on," Bagnell said.

She sighed. "So, we got here, drove around the block a couple of times to find a place to park..." Manfredo made a growling sound in his throat.

Owen looked at him. "Just as bad as Rome?" He smiled.

The dark man looked as blank as a dead T.V.

"Miss Pawlowski said you were Italian," Owen explained. Manfredo Rialto grinned. It was a slow transformation as the corners of his eyes tweaked upward and his mouth opened to a lopsided half-moon. He looked like one of those old Greek masks of Comedy that used to hang in the Art Deco movie houses downtown:

"Italian. Italian," he chortled in a thick accent. "That is good, very good. No, Señor, I am Colombian." He continued to giggle to himself as if it were some enormous joke.

Bagnell asked Penelope Wiciak to continue, and she told him that they had knocked on Miss Pawlowski's door but didn't get an answer. She had gone around the side of the building and looked through the open cantilever window above Miss Pawlowski's throne, a triple overstuffed chair that had been reupholstered somewhere around 1938.

She had seen her aunt all right, sitting below the window and not doing much of anything. She was slumped sideways, and the niece got scared because the old lady

wasn't the kind who snoozed in chairs. The niece told Manfredo to stay put while she busted across the street to use Cernauskas' phone (he charged her twenty cents) to call the police.

A patrol car and paramedics from the fire department had arrived in record time — about twenty-five minutes. The door was locked so they had to break the lock. Inside they found a very cold corpse. That was about it.

"Listen," she said flatly, "I'd like to get out of here. Can we go?"

Owen realized he was numb to the knees and dusted with snow. He said they could, repeated his regrets and watched them walk on the slushy sidewalk to a car. He went down to Miss Pawlowski's flat, where the preliminary investigator and the police surgeon were having a quiet smoke.

Bagnell thought Miss Pawlowski was already turning before she hit the grave. His own mouth felt dry, and he glanced around to keep from looking like an addict waiting for his kick.

The front room was large, stuffily furnished with dark and gloomy pieces that were good Grand Rapids before he was born. The carpet was floral, thin and spotless. A chromolithograph in gaudy colors of St. Stanislas of Cracow leaning on his pastoral staff reposed in an age-tarnished gilt frame over a radio that had a small dial and twenty pounds of

tubes behind the veneered cabinet.

A brown shaft of a dead palm was stuck between the saint and the frame. The room didn't have the expected odor of stale vacuum cleaner dust because the angled window over her hulking chair was open and ventilating arctic breezes.

Her solid needlepoint frame was slightly askew — the boys had probably moved the stand to get to the body. The design was definitely a mosaic, though only two rows of blocks were stitched. The tag end of the last row was drooping from the back — he couldn't see a needle. A roll of masking tape — she used it to bind the edges, to keep them from fraying — was lying in her open yarn bag beside the chair.

"What's the deal?" Owen asked. The surgeon shrugged.

"Heart attack is my guess," he replied. "She was old. No signs of violence, bruises or wounds." He looked for an ashtray, couldn't find one, and stuffed his dead butt into a pocket of his coat.

The other man closed the window, grunting, and said, "Ought to have croaked from exposure."

Owen snickered. "Got any ideas on time?"

The doctor picked up his bag and walked to the door, glancing at his watch. He pulled a long face. "Damn! Late again. Time of death? Sometime in the morn-

ning," he answered and thumped up the steps.

The investigating officer followed Owen out into the hall and pulled the door. Somebody would screw on a padlock. Owen went upstairs, expecting a heavy interrogation from Maria. He got it.

She ripped off the questions like a story-boy from the *Tribune* while she dabbed things from tubes and pots onto her face. He gave her what there was, which wasn't much, and had a hard time doing it because he had his mouth around a plain peanut butter sandwich he had made to fend off starvation.

When she was finished putting on her face she looked beautiful and skeptical. "What did you think of that guy, Rialto?" she asked.

Owen swallowed thickly. "Not much of a looker, big on macho and doesn't cry for money," he answered. "Probably wishes he was back in Colombia."

She snorted, wrinkling her small nose. "I thought he looked greasy, like a bag of tacos."

"Okay, let me ask you one," he said. "What does she do?"

Maria lifted a maroon dress over her head. Her voice was muffled. "Freelance artist, Miss Pawlowski said. Advertising. She didn't go for it, but I guess the niece gets by." Her head popped through the neck. "Or else she gets a lot of loans at low interest."

He read her but said, "Owes her soul, to charge cards, more likely. Rialto's type expects American women to pay their own way. And speaking of ways, what's *his* line?"

She dug around on the floor of the closet for a pair of sling-backed pumps, black. "That's two questions. He's supposed to be an importer. I didn't know Colombia had anything to export except coffee. Miss. P. thought he was a macaroni merchant or some godawful thing."

They laughed together.

During the night it had snowed heavily. Tom was late. The wind was cold. Entirely miserable, Owen huddled in a nook at the newsstand. Cernauskas was comparing the not-so-recent demise of his grandmother under similar circumstances. It went in one frozen ear and out the other.

"...and she sure looked fine when I saw her," Cernauskas concluded.

"Who?" Bagnell asked numbly. Where in hell was Tom?

"Miss Pawlowski. Went walkin' right about the time they dropped off the Daily News. You know they're goin' outa business?"

Finally. "Uh, huh," Owen grunted and leaped for the LTD.

Later that afternoon, he put in a call to Miss Pawlowski's attorney to inquire about funeral arrangements. He wasn't in. About fifteen minutes later, the party called back at the same instant Owen

succeeded in stapling his left thumb to a stack of reports.

He swore, snatched up the receiver and barked his name. A small trickle of blood was looking very pretty on his note pad.

A tinny nasal voice on the other end announced, "Yes, Lieutenant. Cecil Zilberstein, Miss Pawlowski's attorney."

Owen ransacked his drawers for a Bandaid. "Thanks for calling," he mumbled and scrounged an antique Kleenex and some narrow tape. He hoped he wouldn't get blood poisoning. "I'd like to know about the funeral arrangements," he explained.

Zilberstein hummed. "They're undetermined. There is some difficulty in getting the relatives together," he stated.

Owen inquired casually, "Lots of relatives?"

The hum became more intense, like a bee hovering over its target. "There remain a brother and a sister. The brother is in Arizona, the sister in Buffalo. A second sister is deceased."

For no reason at all, Bagnell asked him if the deceased sister would be Miss Wiciak's mother. It was. Zilberstein dove in. He reported that Miss Pawlowski had had very little in personal property, except for the flat, and not a whole lot in savings — thrift notwithstanding. A Social Security check would be cancelled.

"Naturally," Owen responded. "Any insurance?"

"She had a term policy from her employer, the bakery, but I believe it expired earlier in the week. It seems to me a one-month notification to that effect was included in the last bundle of papers she sent over. Shall I check?"

Bagnell told him not to bother, thanked him and asked him to let him know about the funeral. The man said he would.

His finger throbbed for the rest of the day under a new dressing he begged from a secretary. It became particularly acute later when Maria dished up stir-fried liver with onions that had been marinated in soy sauce and copious quantities of garlic. It was an original. He ate it.

He knew it was a waste of time to work on his canvas while his thumb was sore, and he fretted at the coat of dust it was gathering. He would have sold his mother for a cigaret at that moment. The T.V. supplement was a bust. In desperation he sat through *Ulysses* for the third time while Maria pondered the aesthetics of texture in Mandarin cuisine.

Owen liked costume adventures and Kirk Douglas in particular. He didn't like the twenty-eight (at least) commercials. It was over at ten. He skipped the news — all bad — and hit the sack. He didn't have to count fuzzy-woolies.

Something was very wrong. The director must have gone nuts. It

was crazy, but he was wrapped in masking tape and lashed to Ulysses' immovable bed while Kirk Douglas was shooting arrows through narrow hoops at a boot.

A wail that sounded like a lost cat filled the murky room. Whose squirrelly idea was this and why didn't the idiot turn on the lights? He could barely make out Penelope at her loom. She seemed to be slashing the tapestry with little scissors!

A cold blast struck him in the face. He heaved against the tape. Criminey, it was sticky! He heaved harder and harder again and bolted.

He opened his eyes and felt his hands pawing at the bedding. They were clammy. His knees were shaky as his feet fell over onto the floor. Bagnell knew two things — in twenty seconds he was going to be violently ill and Miss Pawlowski had been murdered. He made it to the bathroom with time to spare and solved the first problem...it took him about ten minutes to hash out the second. He sat on the edge of the tub in a cold sweat and stared at the floor. The neat rows of little ceramic tiles looked like a tenth-century Seljuk mosaic.

At the office Friday morning he made four phone calls. The first was to Cecil Zilberstein, saying he'd like to have a copy of the insurance policy and certificate after all, and could he please have someone drop them off? The

second was to Immigration, the third to the FBI and the fourth to Marty in the Coroner's office at Cook County Hospital.

"Marty, do me a favor," Owen said.

"What's up?" Marty asked without interest.

"I need an autopsy a.s.a.p.," Owen answered.

Marty yawned. "Homicide?" It was more of a statement.

Owen grunted. "Looks like. Tell the Doc to see if the lady had a shave."

Marty stifled a second yawn. "Shave?"

"Right," Owen replied and outlined the specifics. Marty took it down.

"I'll get on it," he said, "but don't hold your breath — half the department's out with the flu."

"I owe ya." Owen hung up. He took a rain check on the Peanut Butter Cups.

He didn't begin getting results until late afternoon. Marty was first in line.

"Hi," he said. "I passed your I.O.U. on to Harris."

That was fast. Owen knew the doctor slightly. Rotund, bald and pushing fifty. Probably had a wad of parking tickets. "What'd he come up with?"

Marty chuckled. "You guessed right — the lady had a zipped lip. Also a high percentage of carboxyhemoglobin in the blood, congested lungs, the whole scene. You'll get the report next week."

A few minutes later Zilberstein's secretary dropped off the papers and looked miffed. She was forty-ish, skinny and wore nylons that drooped around her ankles. She didn't like being imposed upon but Bagnell thought she wouldn't like much of anything.

Immigration came up so-so, but the boys at the FBI were a little more enthusiastic.

Bagnell lined up two Evidence Technicians, told them where to go, what to grab and to stay put. When he called Maria he told her not to expect him for dinner.

"But Owen!" she wailed. "I've specially made braised carp in chicken fat Number One!"

He choked. "Sorry." He didn't even want to think about Number Two.

He and Varma dropped by Miss Wiciak's apartment, which was a couple of dilapidated rooms a few streets away from New Town. The contents were mostly artsy-craftsy with a lot of raggedy starved plants. She was in and so was Rialto.

They were unpleasantly surprised when the two detectives suggested they visit Miss Pawlowski's flat. Owen was disgustingly cheerful and made inane comments about some of the brochure-type layouts tacked over cracks in the wall. They went over like a lead cloud.

She and Rialto weren't uplifted when they walked in on the two

Evidence Technicians at Miss Pawlowski's flat. One was busy undusting; the other had just done a superlative job of putting the needlepoint frame under wraps. Owen wondered how he was with Christmas presents.

For a long moment, Miss Wiciak's mouth gaped. Then she exploded. "What the hell are they doing?"

"Just routine right now, Miss Wiciak," Owen said. And it was—the charges would come at headquarters. "I thought you'd like to know that your aunt was murdered. It wasn't heart failure."

He looked at her narrowly. She had a big face anyway, and it didn't look nice when she turned mean. Her jaw tightened and clamped shut. It would have been funny...on T.V. Rialto looked around him and stuffed his hands in his coat pockets.

"I do not understand this at all," he said. He looked genuinely surprised. Owen shouldn't have felt sorry for him, but he did, a little.

Penelope turned. "Shut up," she choked through clenched teeth. The South American paled and his eyes sparked suddenly.

"What in the name of the Saints have you *done*?" he demanded. He said it slowly, smoothly, as if he were physically drawing each word across her throat. She took a half-step back. Rialto turned to Owen and sneered.

"I have nothing to do with this," he stated and waved his arm in a circle. "Killing an old lady. For what?" He shook his head. "I have seen many bad things, but this...*this!*" He looked as if he wanted to spit on the carpet.

It was late by the time Bagnell and Varma were on their way back to Montrose. All the packages had been filed, along with Miss Wiciak and Manfredo. It was a boring ride and they were tired. Varma punched at the lighter in the dash. It wouldn't heat.

"I can't figure what tipped you off," he mumbled around the cigarette and dug in his pockets for a match.

Owen leaned back against the seat. "Ulyses, the Daily News and Chinese stir-fried liver. With onions."

His partner looked at him as if he had just gotten off the last shuttle from Mars.

"Okay." Owen sighed. "The insurance certificate from Miss Pawlowski's employer stated that her term insurance policy would run out on noon, Wednesday. Noon was a typo — they meant midnight Tuesday — but it could have held up. The beneficiary of the policy was Wiciak's mother.

"She died and Miss P. never bothered to change to another beneficiary because she didn't expect to die and her other relatives were doing fine. So, Wiciak

thought, she had a good chance to collect as next of kin."

Varma nodded. "But why did she wait so long? And what about Rialto? I mean, they cut it pretty thin."

Owen fumbled in his coat. "Rialto was out of it. His only crime there was his lack of character judgment. No, his problem is with the FBI for smuggling emeralds in from Colombia. The Feds were going to pull him in in a day or so, and I think he was going to bail out while he could.

"Wiciak wanted to follow him but didn't have the money to carry her for a couple of years. She's not the kind for whom lightning strikes twice, and I'm pretty sure she didn't want to let Rialto get out of her sight for very long."

Varma looked negative. "She couldn't hope to collect overnight."

"No," Bagnell said, "but she could have gone to a finance company and borrowed on it — and she wouldn't have lost any sleep about skipping the payments since she had no intention of coming back to the U.S. Only one thing screwed her up — she couldn't knock off her aunt before noon. Remember the jam up on the Kennedy that day?"

Varma rolled his eyes and grunted.

Owen said, "She had to make it look like the morning. The open window was in her favor — mess

up time of death. She took a strip of masking tape and slapped it over Miss Pawlowski's mouth and suffocated her. Wiciak had the advantage in weight and age. Then, to make sure, she cut away at the needlepoint to make it look like the old lady had just gotten going. The Lab'll confirm."

"It's a nice puzzle," Varma said, "but you haven't got enough pieces to suit me."

"Right," his partner said, "except for this — Cernauskas saw Miss P. go for a walk when they dropped off the Daily News. At one o'clock. She couldn't have died in the morning. And if she hadn't died in the morning, she would have been farther along on the mosaic. It was a very fast stitch, not twisty."

Varma made a clicking sound with his teeth. "How would you know how quick it was or wasn't?"

Owen chuckled. "Simple. She taught me how to do it. Said I needed a hobby to get my mind off cigarettes. I'm starting my second canvas."

"Well I'll be fried!" His partner swore. He was silent for a minute as they watched the lights on the expressway string themselves together like a necklace of rubies and diamonds. Then he glanced at Owen. "Did it?"

"What?"

"Help you stop smoking?"

Owen shook his head sadly and pulled a red box out of his pocket. "Not really. Gotta light?"

A Man Could Get Killed

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It seemed a rendezvous with fate, the meeting of the priest and the paranoid killer — but destiny had another idea.

GRAND AVENUE, as specious as its name, runs north from downtown to the lake, a distance in all of some two miles. Crossing it at right angles, about two-thirds of the way up, is Tenth Street, a sunny thoroughfare of shops and schools, churches and banks.

Both streets are shown in red as major arteries on city maps, and their cruciform convergence seems to hold some dark omen for those who seek such things. The intersection has always been a busy one, and a bad one for traffic accidents. A man could get killed there, one way or another.

He awakened that morning with the taste of failure in his mouth. Not even the drinking of the previous night had done anything to relieve it.

It was the priest's fault, of course, because he was the one who had finally told Joan to leave home. The priest — Father Miller, a pompous old man who understood neither the pleasures of the bed nor the duties of a wife.

After he had lost his job and

Joan had left him on the priest's advice, he had gone out one day and purchased a gun, a .25 caliber Browning automatic that weighed only a half-pound and fitted easily into his jacket pocket. He was going to kill the priest that day, but he couldn't find him.

A week later he learned by chance that Father Miller had been transferred to a country church at the other end of the diocese.

For a time his hatred — or fear? — had subsided. But through weeks of trying to find a new job, through two messy encounters with his estranged wife and her final summoning of the police, all the old frustrations had returned.

He got up that morning in the little furnished apartment where he was staying and looked all about him, taking in the seedy wallpaper and the dusty tables, and the fluff of stuffing that showed from one corner of the chair. He kicked out angrily at one of the empty bottles, but it did

nothing to calm the storm of madness building within him. A failure. A failure at thirty-two, fired from his job, dismissed by his wife, verging on alcoholism.

He stepped over the bottles to his dresser, and took the Browning automatic from its resting place. For a time he considered killing himself, but the madness had gone too far for that. Then he considered killing Joan, but dismissed that too. No, it was the priest who must die, as he had known all along.

The priest who had counseled her to leave him. And if Father Miller was beyond his reach, it would be some other priest, the first priest he could find.

He put the gun in his jacket pocket and went outside. The apartment was on the corner of Grand Avenue and Second Street. He debated only a moment before he started walking north on Grand.

Father Joyce left the rectory a little before ten. It was only six short blocks along Tenth Street to the bank — three blocks to Grand Avenue and then three more beyond that. Certainly on such a warm May morning he could walk that distance. No one was going to rob him of the sack of children's pennies he carried in one hand.

He waved to a neighbor as he walked, a non-Catholic lawyer with whom he sometimes played golf. Tenth Street was no longer the best area of the city, but it was

still better than the city's south side with its creeping slums. The homes were old but well kept up, like his parishioners.

He liked Tenth Street. It had been home to him for all these years, and sometimes, when he couldn't sleep, the only dread that intruded his restless mind was that some day the bishop might move him to another parish.

"Good morning, Father."

He reached to tip his hat, then remembered he wasn't wearing it. He really was growing absent-minded these days. "Hello, Vera. How are the children today?"

"At school, thank heaven."

"The little one's better?"

She was a large, bony woman whom he had helped to begin a new life after her husband had died in the war. A good woman, really, for all her temptations. "He's fine, Father. I should feel so frisky!"

He smiled and brushed back his graying hair. "The spring is good for us all, Vera. A rebirth."

"What's in the sack, Father?"

"A few poor coins from the school children. I'm taking them to the bank."

He walked on, humming softly to himself some melody from a jazz mass they had presented at the high school the week before. It was a good day.

People sometimes called him Red, and he didn't really mind it. She had never called him that. She had never called him anything

much, except to abuse and threaten and complain. He had been right to hit her, right in what else he did, too. That priest had no business telling her to leave him. No business.

He crossed Third Street and walked on toward Fourth, his right hand tight around the pistol in his pocket. How far might he have to go to find a priest? He remembered a church near the lake somewhere. Yes, he would find one.

He passed a liquor store on Grand, a shabby place like the rest of the neighborhood, with a broken neon sign that flickered and buzzed in the morning sun. He could have turned in here, bought a few bottles of wine, and forgotten all about it. But the need was too strong now. The roots too deep.

He had to kill.

Had to.

Across Fourth, waiting for the traffic light, then on toward Fifth. A policeman. A bakery driver delivering his bread. Stores along here crowded with neighborhood people. But no priest. He would have to go further north, toward the lake.

A block and a half from Grand Avenue, Father Joyce turned into the barber shop. He didn't need a haircut, but he often stopped when they weren't busy to pass the time of day. Danny and Mike were both parishioners, nice fellows.

"Morning, Father! Want a trim?"

He rested the bag of coins on top of a month-old magazine. "Not today, boys. Not today. On my way to the bank. How's business?"

"Slow, Father. Tuesday's never very busy."

Father Joyce nodded. "Will I be seeing you at the Men's Club dinner next week?"

"Try to, Father. Depends on the wife."

"Good, good!" He chatted a few more minutes and then left the shop, continuing to walk toward Grand Avenue.

Sixth Street was the beginning of the better neighborhood, and he had once dated a girl who lived there. What was her name? He couldn't even remember now. Selma something. Long ago, in another life. Before Joan.

Joan had told him once he was crazy, that he ought to see a doctor. But a doctor was not the answer for him. A priest was the answer. A priest — a devil who must be exorcised. Kill the priest, shoot him down in the street, and after that his luck would change. There'd be a job waiting, perhaps even Joan would find her way back to him.

He thought he saw one just ahead, and he hurried a bit, but it was only an elderly man in a black suit and hat. No priest. He might have to walk all the way to the lake to find one, might have to enter a church and shoot one down at the altar.

"He looked both ways on Seventh

Street, but there was nothing in sight. No priests, only a few children playing some forgotten game of numbers chalked on a sidewalk.

He crossed Seventh and continued north.

Father Joyce reached the corner of Tenth and Grand, and paused for the traffic light. While he waited he glanced casually down the length of Grand Avenue, reflecting on the changes a few years could make on a once-fine street.

His parish boundaries extended only a few blocks south, but he had a natural interest in the land beyond, in the sleazy rooming houses and furnished apartments, in the drifters and divorcees and deserters from life who made their homes there. Someday, perhaps, he could do something for them.

The light changed and he started across Grand Avenue. A busy intersection, always had been. A bad one for accidents, motorists trying to run the light and others, with high-powered cars, surging forward. There had been a fatal crash just last year. He was glad he'd walked.

"Good morning, Father."

"Morning, Mrs. Rankin. How's your husband?"

Always the same faces, but they were good faces. Even in the darkness of the confessional their sins were the sins of children, not the complex cruelties of the modern suburb.

He reached the opposite curb and continued on his way, past the intersection. The bank came into view, only three blocks away, and he stepped up his pace a bit. He was a block beyond Grand Avenue when he remembered he had forgotten the sack of pennies, left it sitting on the barber shop table.

Eighth Street, with its light industry, the button factory, seemed almost a part of another world. Many people in the neighborhood, women especially, worked at the button factory, and he — the one sometimes called Red — had often watched them heading home at the day's end.

But during his brief stay he had never considered himself a part of the neighborhood. He had never even spoken to anyone except his landlady and the man in the liquor store. There was no one else to speak to, not really.

By the time he reached Ninth, he was beginning to despair. Where did all the priests go on a Tuesday morning? Why weren't they out tending their flocks? Perhaps they were visiting the hospitals, and inspecting the schools — and meddling in lives like Joan's and his.

He would go just a few blocks more and, if he didn't find a priest, he would kill someone else, a child perhaps — someone whose death would matter. As his life mattered.

Tenth Street was just ahead. He

walked on, his eyes passing over the faces and shapes, searching, searching.

Hurrying back the way he had come, Father Joyce was almost to Grand Avenue once more. A faulty memory was the devil's own curse. How could he have left those pennies in the barber shop? How could he have walked nearly three blocks without their tugging weight and not even realize it?

The sack, in a way, was like his cross — a weight of goodness that only seemed evil to those who looked no further than the surface of things. Even money on its way to the bank could have a goodness when it represented the sacrifices of the school children.

He started across Grand Avenue once more, looking straight ahead his time because he was hurrying. A car honked its horn, and he realized the light had changed. They didn't wait these days, not or anybody.

Joan. Could it really be Joan? Up here at the corner of Tenth street? He tried to see into the car, trotting a few feet alongside.

"Joan?"

She turned her face and he realized his mistake. Not Joan, never Joan. This girl was plain and middle-aged, lacking the perfect beauty of his Joan.

And then he saw the priest.

Bare-headed, crossing the intersection. He had passed just in front of Red unnoticed. Now he was almost to the other side.

Almost, but not quite.

He dashed into the street between the cars, his hand tight around the gun in his jacket pocket. One shot, two, or maybe three. Be sure — be *sure*. Don't spoil it now.

Father Miller? It might even be Father Miller. Yes, it might. "*Father!*" he called out, to detain him only a second. "*Father — here!*"

The light had changed and some car honked, but the priest had turned, hearing his cry. And now he was within range with his tiny pistol, now could not miss. He stood exactly in the center of the intersection and wet his lips in silent anticipation, seeing the quizzical look on the face of the priest, seeing Joan somewhere far away, seeing it all, and feeling the chill steel of the gun in his pocket.

Now.

The bank manager was standing by the door when Father Joyce entered. "What was all the excitement over on Grand Avenue, Father? I heard the ambulance."

The priest set down his load of pennies. "A poor man was killed by a car. Terrible thing. I did what I could for him, but he died almost at once."

"That's a bad corner. Always has been."

Father Joyce nodded sadly. "The strange thing was, the man called to me before the car hit him. I believe he was trying to tell me something."

Old Tiger

by RICHARD G. PYEATTE

The last thing Old Julio wanted from the three strangers in the little Mexican town was trouble — but, if trouble came he wanted to be ready to handle it.

HE WAITED in the soft, warm darkness, crouched inside the half-open doorway, pistol cocked and ready. A solitary drop of perspiration tracked across the dirt on his weathered face, but he made no move to wipe it away. The smooth, wooden butt of the old pistol was slippery in his hand with the mixture of sweat and blood from the cut on his palm and the salt in the open wound made it sting a little.

He waited, staring out into the darkness beyond the abandoned adobe hut, looking for some movement and listening for any sound, the way an animal who is hunted stops and feels the air around him, sensing the hunter.

Like an animal, he cocked his head to one side and urged his perception out beyond him into the clumps of brush and rock at the edge of the clearing in front of the hut. His arms and back quivered with fatigue, and he had to

force himself to breathe more slowly.

He inhaled, counted to three, exhaled slowly and kept listening in the night. There was no sound but he was well aware of the one who waited out there among the rocks and brush, just as he waited poised and ready. He eased the pistol to his left hand and wiped his right on the heavy cloth of his faded and stained levi trousers, then returned the gun to his right hand again.

How many times, he wondered had he held a weapon and how many times had he fired at human target? The old pistol he held — had anyone ever fallen before it? He looked at the pistol — a Colt, single-action 44-40 Peacemaker with a seven-and-one-half-inch barrel — a antique by modern standards, but deadly enough.

Perhaps, he mused, the gun was a lot like himself, old and worn.

but still capable. An AK-47 would be nice, or perhaps a Stoner rifle with a night 'scope on it, or a custom-made Mauser-66 with its lethal accuracy.

But all he had was this old single-action, probably dropped by some cowboy many years ago, picked up, cleaned and then handed down from father to son. He felt the weight of the pistol in his hand and wondered again if it had ever killed. He knew one thing for certain — *he had*.

The man the people of the small Mexican town knew as Julio Martinez indeed knew about killing. Far too much. Firearms, explosives, acids, and if necessary, the hard steel tongue of a knife that could silence a human tongue effectively and quietly.

But all of that had been long ago, and he was too old to be out in the night, facing a hard situation such as this. He shifted slightly, easing the tiny cramp in one leg. Now he had no choice in the matter; something in him had flared up, something reborn after a long sleep, and he had reacted. So once again he faced men who would kill him if they could.

You old goat! he thought. What are you doing out here? He shook his head. You are a tiger, you think, taking on three armed men before supper? You were fifty-three last month, you should be sitting in the sun, relaxing!

He thought wryly that they put

old racehorses out to pasture, but what did they do with old... tigers? Some old, graying tiger, out running in the night again, because instinct prodded him one more time.

Early that morning, a long automobile with three men inside had driven into the town and parked in front of the *tienda*.

The three men had climbed out of the car and entered the store, looking at the things and browsing through the stacks of goods piled on the floor and on the shelves, trying on sombreros, sarapes, leather belts and Panama hats, making comments about their appearance in these things in the manner of most *turistas*.

No one had paid them any more attention than they would to the few others who wandered in from time to time and would again, later.

Of course, the automobile had attracted several people. While cars were not unknown in the town, they were still not a daily thing, especially so new and fine a car. The children of the town clustered about the car, to touch it and to stare at it and the men who had come in it.

At first, Julio, too, had noticed only the automobile — a long, luxurious machine, gleaming beneath the grime and dust that covered it. But then, one of the men had pushed Julio aside in a rough manner, and Julio had seen a certain look in the man's eye —

the look of a snake that watches without blinking before it strikes. The eyes were blue, as were those of most Norteamericanos, but it was not the color that Julio saw so much as it was the expression in them.

"Out of the way, old man!" he had said and Julio had let himself be pushed aside without speaking or acting.

A long time had passed since he had seen that particular look, and Julio was disturbed to see it again in his town.

'Old man,' the cold-eyed man had called him and, while it was true that Julio was no longer young, the term had been applied without respect or even courtesy. Perhaps the work in the fields, the hot sun and the dry wind can age a man on the surface, along with the years.

But in each old man there lives a young one who has not acknowledged the passing of time, and this young one feels the same feelings at times that he felt many years ago, anger among them. But the look that he saw in the other man's eye was a thing that one saw once and did not forget. Their coldness and purpose spoke without words of one who had little respect for the goods or even the life of another who might stand in his way.

The large one in the light blue suit had tried to ask a question of Julio in very poor Spanish, but even so, Julio had understood him

and, for a moment, thought of replying in English. Something — some slight wariness perhaps — had caused Julio to pause and pretend much difficulty in grasping the meaning before he answered haltingly.

No, Julio had told him, no airplane had come. He kept a bland, almost sleepy expression on his face and his hat in his hand as he spoke to the fat man.

The man had wiped his forehead and cursed, dismissing Julio, who wondered why they had come to such a small village to meet an airplane when none had landed there before. It did not seem a good thing, so Julio had sat on the big rock in front of the store, pulled his hat low over his eyes and listened.

The large man expected a plane to land on the flat land to the east of the village and take him, along with the black case that was in the car north to the border, flying at night. The man seemed worried and spoke of terrible vengeance if the airplane failed to appear or if the pilot of it told of his mission.

"Take it easy, Tiny," the older, cold-eyed one said. "Some of these gooks might understand English. What about that old lizard there squattin' on that rock?"

"*Him?* Nah, he doesn't even speak his own language," the one called Tiny replied. "That flake of a pilot you hired had better be closed mouthed and on time, or

he's in big trouble, Stitch."

"Aw, cool it, Tiny," said the third one, a young, husky, light-haired man. "We have the stuff and Pete may act flaky sometimes, but he knows he don't get a dime 'til we get stateside. He'll show, so stop raising dust about it."

"Why didn't we just bring the stuff straight in from 'Nam like before?" said Tiny. "All this damn heat and dirt and these stupid spics are starting to bug me!"

The older man shrugged. "Cooper and Beaumont got busted, that's why. The CID must've got wise, so now it's 'Plan-B', okay?"

"Stuff?" Julio repeated quietly to himself. He felt his heart beat a little faster, but he only sat still and looked sleepy in the warm, late-afternoon sun. The words *Nam*, *stuff* and *CID* began to form a picture in Julio's mind that disturbed him, but he tried to ignore it.

Just then, one of the boys who had gathered about the auto looked inside it to see the small, black suitcase on the seat. The window of the car was open and the boy reached through to touch the fine looking suitcase.

Perhaps he was only curious, or perhaps he meant to offer to carry it and earn a few centavos, but as his fingers touched it, the young, husky man with the Western accent, moving very quickly, knocked the boy spinning

into the dust of the street.

Julio had almost moved then, but he checked himself. It would be better, he reasoned, to wait and learn more, and besides, the boy was not truly hurt, only badly frightened. Julio let himself relax, pushed his hat back on his head and began to roll a cigaret with one hand, just to see if time and age had robbed him of the ability to perform that small act of coordination.

They had not, and he was pleasantly surprised. He lighted the cigaret with a wooden match and looked thoughtfully at the baked earth of the plaza in front of him, thinking of the three men in the big black car.

The lean, hard-eyed older man pulled the case from the car and carried it into the store, setting it by the doorway where he could watch it more easily. As the man moved by him, Julio saw the short-barreled pistol that rode in a spring-clip holster attached to the man's belt under his brightly colored pullover shirt.

"*Estupido!*" Julio told himself under his breath. "Now try to tell yourself they are merely *turistas!* They are doperunners, donkey-brain."

A part of his life — another life in another world — came back to him then, and Julio felt an apprehension that was hard to put aside. He extinguished the butt of the cigaret by rubbing it between his palms, letting the few shreds of

tobacco blow away in the dry wind. Whatever was happening with those men was none of his business — not a thing to concern himself with.

In time, the men would be gone and it would be for others to worry about what they did. Someone from the *policia*, or the hard-handed narcotics men would come looking for them, and it was not for him — Julio — to try to stop them and perhaps cause much trouble for himself and perhaps others as well.

Indeed, if the men who looked for narcotics should catch these men, they would end up confessing to stealing the moon and trying to smoke it before the questioning was done. Yes, it would be better to keep silent and avoid trouble, if that were possible with men such as these.

La boca cerrada no atrapa moscas — the closed mouth traps no flies. He hoped that the three would soon be on their way and leave the town as it had been before they came to it.

So it might have been had the daughter of a friend, a girl of fifteen, not chosen that particular afternoon to wander into the store, or if the youngest of the men had not noticed her. Then the men would have waited for the airplane and left when it arrived and all would have been as before.

But the man followed her with his eyes as she entered the store and — who knows? — perhaps she

looked at him in the way of a young girl whose sense lags behind her curiosity. In any case, the man did notice her and seized her by the arm, pulling her closer to him.

He spoke crudely to his companions while smiling at the girl and she, not knowing the meaning of his words, had smiled timorously in return, which made the man laugh. He hugged her closer until his meaning was all too plain and she began to struggle to free herself.

As she tried to push the man away, her brother, who often confused temper with courage, stepped into the store and, seeing, lunged, swinging at the man with a pocket knife. The thicknecked man expertly parried the thrust and, faster than the telling of it, the boy lay on the floor, bleeding from his mouth and watching the man's finger tighten on the trigger of his stubby revolver.

At the moment the boy moved through the doorway, Julio had known what was bound to happen and he was up and moving. It was no longer time for thinking, and Julio's fist cracked solidly against the man's jawbone as his other hand slashed downward, knocking the pistol away.

The man stumbled backwards into a stack of dry goods, his arms flailing. Julio's leg kicked sideways, knee high, sending the older man off balance as he was reaching for his gun.

In the brief, confused seconds that followed, Julio turned and scooped up the small suitcase and dived through the doorway, racing for the end of the building and the alleyway there. The heavyset man and the one with the hard eyes moved together toward the doorway, guns in their hands, but Julio was halfway the length of the building before they were outside.

He ducked into the alley at the end of the store as a bullet slammed into the wall beyond him. The men followed him into the alley and another shot ripped past his ear as Julio rounded the corner at its far end.

Backtracking, Julio lost his pursuers long enough to stop by his house. As he saddled his horse, he ordered his wife to bring him the old pistol in its worn holster. She did so and Julio looped the gunbelt over the broad saddlehorn, swung into the saddle and urged the horse away from the town and into the desert.

As he hoped they would, the men saw him when he reached the edge of town, and it was not by chance that he took the old rutted road that led to the abandoned hut that lay five kilometers beyond the community.

The men had been somewhat delayed by the widow Sanchez' very mean dog who had become very excited by the noise and the running and decided that the fat man required biting a little. Julio made a silent promise that the ill-

favored hound, despite his unhappy reputation, would receive some treat to remove the taste of the heavy man's leg from his mouth.

Julio paused long enough to look backward and see the long automobile bouncing up the trail two hundred meters or more behind him. The dog and the return to their car had slowed the men and it was likely that, in their haste, they had not stopped to harm anyone in the town. Julio slowed his pace just enough to be sure they would see him and follow.

To encourage them, he stood in the stirrups and shook his fist at them. Another shot whined off of a rock down the trail below him and Julio put his heels to the horse. The short-barreled guns had no range, and it was not too hard to keep in sight and yet out of the reach of their weapons.

He dismounted in front of the hut and tied his red and white handkerchief to the stirrup to let his wife know that he had not been struck from the saddle when the beast returned. He smacked the horse on the rump, clucked a soft, "Ha! La Casa!" to it, then turned and trotted toward the hut.

He squinted into the lowering sun. It was not too far from sunset, and if he could delay the men long enough, their anxiety at the delay might make them careless. He counted the shells in the pistol and in the belt; there were five in the

pistol and five more in the belt loops, and if these were not enough, then he would be a dead man.

He thought of his wife and hoped that he would not be a dead man. He smiled, then chided himself for thinking of such things at a time when he needed all of his wits about him, but he felt an exhilaration that he had not felt for a long time.

The hut commanded a good view of the trail and the clearing below that would make it very difficult for anyone to come too near without chancing a bullet for his trouble. A canyon behind the hut made any approach from that quarter nearly impossible, so his position, despite the odds, was not bad at all.

The car arrived in a whirl of dust and the three men got out, their guns in their hands. Julio fired two quick shots, sending them scurrying into the brush and rocks and behind the car. One of the men howled and swore, and Julio knew that one of his shots had found hide to burn.

He fired again and the big car tilted sideways, one rear tire now flat. Now there would be no returning to the town for a hostage or two — not without some risk under the sights of the old pistol in Julio's hand. He let out a held breath, feeling the sweat begin to run down his sides.

"Don't be stupid, Pops," one of the men called across the open

space. "There are three of us against only one of you. Just toss out that suitcase and we'll let you go on home, okay?"

"Step out where I can see you, Senor, and I will give you a loud answer."

"The old buzzard speaks English!" one of the men said angrily. "Now we've got to blow him away before that plane gets here!"

A second later, a shot splintered the wooden doorframe three inches above Julio's head. He jerked backwards, realizing that he had been too exposed and, as he did so, his hand caught on a nailhead protruding from the weathered wood, gouging the flesh deeply enough to draw blood.

Julio reprimanded himself silently for his carelessness. It would not do to be so careless again, even in small things. Graveyards are filled by men who were just a little careless in some small thing.

The nearness of the shot had made him a little fearful, which in turn made him angry. Then, close behind the fear and the anger, came another familiar reaction — that of contained, calculating anticipation. It was what he called, for lack of a better term, "hunting fever."

It increased his heartbeat, started the adrenalin flowing and blotted out everything except the game at hand, that of the hunt and

the quarry. The hunted had now in fact become the hunter.

This cold fever was something he had once tried to explain to the people of the village when they had seen it for the first time more than a dozen years ago, but they preferred to think of it as a righteous anger that ignored fear, so he had let it stand that way.

His trip to Mexico had not been for pleasure, but out of necessity and, even after that change, he had found it necessary to alter his plans again at the last minute.

The driver and the helper of a semi-truck had been well paid to accomodate a passenger, providing a nest in an empty crate in the half-full trailer, rolling out of west Texas to San Diego. But the two men had become suspicious as to the identity of their well-paying passenger and, pulling to the side of the interstate a few miles west of Benson, Arizona, decided it was time to advise their soft-spoken, polite supercargo that the rates for unofficial interstate passengers had suddenly increased.

The two men opened the back of the trailer and invited the stranger out for a stroll in one of the deep, sandy washes nearby, but although the wash was dry, the two found that they were, in a manner of speaking, out of their depth.

The axe handle and the ball-peen hammet the part-time truckers carried were no match for the slender blade the stranger had

in a sheath at the back of his neck. Had the bodies of the two not been buried fairly deep, their remains, stripped of clothes and I D, would have provided an unexpected treat for the local desert creatures much sooner.

The passenger knew enough about trucks to drive the rig and, thirty minutes later, it pulled into a truck-stop east of Tucson and parked in the shadows at the far end of the large parking area reserved for trucks.

No one really remembered the tanned, wiry man who ordered a sandwich and a cup of coffee and, by the time the abandoned eighteen-wheeler was discovered, the man, hitchhiking, had doubled-back and, carrying new identification, crossed the Mexican border at Agua Prieta, unquestioned.

One of the truckers had been named Julio Martinez.

Hitchhikers are not encouraged in Mexico and with good reason, but fortunately some American college students, for the welcome offer of a few dollars, gave the man a lift further into the interior.

It was not an easy trip, but one that now had to be made. It was a few days later when, himself hungry and bone weary, the traveler came upon a Mexican family who had a greater problem.

One of the balding tires on the family's elderly pickup truck had gone flat. In the process of changing it, the husband had been

caught under the axle and lay pinned with a broken arm.

The newcomer, now known as Julio, had set the husband's arm, mounted the spare tire and driven the pickup the many kilometers over almost non-existent roads to the village where the family lived. He was courteously but firmly invited to stay and, having no real destination just then, had accepted, assisting the husband until the broken arm healed.

The papers on the stranger gave his name as Martinez and, while he did look much like a Mexican, he was tall, his accent was not really good and his speech was more like that of the border towns of Texas.

However, no questions were asked and no unnecessary information was given, nor did anyone feel that any officials needed to be informed. A man had helped when needed, been willing to work and acted with great gentility and that was all there was to the matter.

In the small town where the family lived, there was a man known simply as *El Jefe* — the Boss — and what he said one must do, one did quickly, no matter what it was. Some said that *El Jefe* was a *bandido* and some said that he was simply a man one did not disagree with, but whatever the facts, it was unwise to fail to do as was ordered by *El Jefe*.

Just before Christmas of that year, *El Jefe* decided that he

should be made mayor of the town and that the people should pay official taxes to him, in addition to any other levies he might demand from time to time. He also decided that the stranger called Julio should be brought before him and questioned as to his place of origin and his financial condition.

So the stranger was brought to the self-appointed mayor and questioned. The matter was conducted with some degree of politeness until the Boss slapped the stranger and threatened him with a knife.

The door of the house had been through the windows, told a fascinating tale of the tall, lean-faced stranger's way of fighting. He moved in a strange, cross-legged manner, but with terrible speed and his hands struck with the quickness of a rattlesnake, as did his elbows, knees and feet.

El Jefe lost his knife to the stranger, and the two men who worked for the Boss fell to the floor with broken bones and missing teeth. It was, they said, a magnificent *combate*, with the stranger working the new mayor as if he were an enraged bull, dodging and striking with grace and skill until *El Jefe* loudly and firmly resigned his new office, climbed on his horse with much difficulty and left, never to return.

The one called Julio had politely refused the office so recently vacated, broken open the-

cashbox of the former mayor and returned the money to those who had surrendered it, and said the matter was closed.

Someone who had seen the fight and the tattoo the stranger had on his shoulder, called him *El Tigre* and the name stuck.

Over the years, there were a few other incidents in which Julio had had to settle a matter of honor and always, if there was the necessity of firm action, it was conducted with dispatch and fairness, and with the same ending.

Other matters, not involving physical dispute, were weighed soberly with all participating equally until it was settled satisfactorily. Each time, Julio had returned to the house he had built, refusing any recognition, and had never spoken of that matter again.

It was more or less understood that Julio was a former soldier who, after a great number of battles and much honor, had chosen to retire as a simple farmer with a small piece of land in the quiet of a remote village. This was, of course, something one could understand easily.

Five years after he had come to the village, he found a *novia*, courted her in the traditional way and, with his bride of gentle ways and quiet beauty, became a settled, respected member of the small community. Inasmuch as he was a former *soldado* and knew of weapons, the men of the village presented him with the old

heavy *pistola* as a gift.

Now, in the abandoned adobe hut, the man they called *El Tigre* waited, watching the sun go down. He thought that perhaps the villagers were right and there was some sort of a tiger in him, but to him it was kind of a controlled madness — a calculating fury — that rose in him now and again, and not as noble as they thought.

True, he had fought and he had killed, but not so much for honor as for pay, and the killing, to spite the fury, was usually done with cool efficiency. He was a loner, a paid gunner whose cause was the dollar, the peso or the Swiss Franc, and that had been the way he had lived for many years after his first taste of war and killing.

The last contract however had been a bad one. He had been on his way to a brush-fire war somewhere else when a former client contacted him with a very lucrative offer, one that would enable him to retire. An important man — a politician who wouldn't listen to reason — needed killing.

The man, the time and the place would be given if the job were accepted and a means of escape would be provided, with all expenses paid. It had seemed a good offer, so he had accepted, but it had gone badly — very badly.

He had intended to stay in the small Mexican town only long enough to reestablish his contacts and then flee to his original desti-

nation, but the people of the town had a problem that could also affect him, so he had acted to remove it. The villagers were polite, minded their own business and were not hypocritical about violence, so he had stayed on.

As time passed, he had found that he even began to *think* like a Mexican, and he derived a kind of satisfaction in working with his hands under the sun, sweating out the bad memories and enjoying the genuine respect the people tendered to him.

Even now, he knew it would be unwise to return to the United States, so he continued to stay, letting the tiger, or whatever it was, sleep and only dreaming sometimes of the feel of a trigger under his finger or the slam of explosives.

He shifted his weight back on his heels slowly and carefully, fearing a sound from the worn boards of the hut floor. The hut had been built by Americans for an American research team, but for some reason, no one had come to live in it after the scientists left and so it remained abandoned, a trysting place for lovers or shelter for passing travelers.

A rustle and a click of rock on rock drew his attention, but he did not fire. He only smiled softly. That was one of the older, wearier tricks in the game of the hunter and the hunted, and he had lived far too long to rise to so clumsy a lure. He waited, hearing the

sound of a light airplane above.

Now they would become impatient and perhaps act hastily, so he would wait quietly, without feeling.

He recalled a game he had played as a child. It was much like this one, except that it did not seem a game at the time.

The neighborhood had been a tough one and the school even tougher, but one day, to save his lunch money, he had defied the bullies and run, finding a hiding place finally after he was too tired to kick and run anymore. One of the gang had stopped within inches of his hiding place and a turn of the bigger boy's head would have revealed the skinny, younger boy who hid.

So he had thought of himself as not existing, not being a living thing at all, but just another cardboard box like the one under which he hid — a flattened box that has no feelings as it lies in the big garbage bin, waiting for the trashman. He had not breathed nor moved, for a box does neither.

At last the young tough had moved off, cursing to himself. They caught him the next day and beat him, but he remembered how it had felt to be a cardboard box, so the beating had not hurt so much.

Now, like that boy of long ago, he waited inside the dark hut, listening for the sounds of his hunters outside and willing himself into an inanimate stillness.

Three shots suddenly fractured the silence and the *olla* hanging from one of the wooden beams that stuck out from the wall, shattered into thick, clay fragments. To his left, one of the bright muzzle flashes briefly illuminated a figure beside a rock and Julio fired once, then rolled quickly to the other side of the doorway.

Two more shots answered instantly behind a harsh gasp of pain outside, and the bullets smacked into the heavy door and the solid adobe wall. Julio pressed his shoulder against the rough earthen surface and counted his enemies one less. A good shot, he thought, and a lucky one.

It would be very likely, he thought further, that one of the two remaining would move around to catch him in a crossfire, coming in from the side to fire through the window, while the other covered the front.

He slipped the *huaraches* from his feet and moved, heel and toe, across the floor along the wall until he came to a hand-hacked beam which had once helped support the ceiling, but had now fallen, leaving a large hole in the roof. One end of the beam rested on the floor near the middle of the room, but the other end still lay against the top of the wall.

Using the fallen timber as a ramp, Julio climbed up and through the hole. There were other, smaller holes, caused by

time and weather, and he stretched out on the roof and peered into the hut through one of these. He was glad there was just a little moonlight now.

There were three bullets left in the pistol and five still in the belt. He ejected the spent cartridges into his hand and, fishing three fresh ones from the belt, thumbed them through the loading gate and into the cylinder. With six shots in the pistol, the odds might be a little better. He eased the hammer back on the Colt and waited.

After a while, he sensed a stir of life by the glassless window and he focussed his attention a little above the source of the sound. His eyes, adjusting, confirmed what his ears had told him — a man crouched by the window, looking for a target.

Julio covered the window with the muzzle of the old .44 and, trading the old trick back to his adversaries, gave the empty shells in his hand a subtle toss through the large hole so that they fell near one dark corner of the hut.

He heard them land softly and so did the man at the window. A series of shots flared from the window, filling the one-room hut with noise. Julio pressed the trigger of his own gun, felt it buck and heard it bellow, then rolled quickly away from the hole, just in case he had missed. He had not.

There was a scramble, then the sound of running feet on the hard-

packed earth in front of the hut and Julio came to his knees in time to see the last of the gunmen racing across the open, moonlit space toward the big car.

The running man — the fat one — paused only long enough to throw two quick shots in the direction of the hut. But in that short time, Julio was able to draw a bead on him and, holding the old pistol in both hands, fired three evenly-spaced shots, aiming slightly low.

The impact from one of the heavy slugs knocked the man off his feet and he sprawled backwards, dead before the echo of the reports had faded.

For a moment then, Julio stayed, kneeling on the roof of the hut, looking upward at the tiny, bright stars far above him, wondering for a bit about the thing in him — that part of him — that joyed in the feel of a weapon in his hand and the terse voice in front of which all men are *really* equal.

He knew surely that this was the last time he would feel that particular way. It was as if, somehow, something had been satisfied, some old debt cancelled. It was just as well, he thought, for even the best of hunters grows weary with age.

He climbed down the slanting timber, replaced his shoes and slipped quietly outside. He cocked the pistol before he toed the body that lay just below the window, but

there was no need for caution as this one was not shamming. A man with the top of his head gone is usually very, very dead.

Julio drifted warily across the open area and found the next one, the one who had complained, lying on the edge of the clearing. The fat man would not concern himself with the flights of private, non-scheduled aircraft any longer.

A small sound made Julio turn suddenly, his gun leveled and finger tightening. He knew instantly that it had been a bad mistake to assume the third man was totally out of action, a mistake that could be fatal.

The older one, the only one of the three who had the look of a real professional, had pulled himself to a sitting position, half-leaning against a large rock. Julio did not fire, but stepped forward quickly and kicked the revolver by the man's knee into a clump of shrub.

"I could've nailed you," the man grunted, "but I figured it wasn't worth it. Just get me a doctor and we'll call it even. I think I took a bad one this time."

Julio knelt and looked at the wound, then shook his head.

"The nearest is many miles away, and I do not think he could help you anyway. I am sorry."

The man made a sound in his throat. "We can make a deal, just the two of us — split fifty-fifty, okay?"

Julio shook his head slowly.

"The suitcase," the man said, gasping hard for breath. "It's got ncut Asian stuff in it...heroin...orth two, maybe three mil on the treet. Half yours."

Again, Julio shook his head.

"Look," the man continued with difficulty, "so we made a assle in your town, so what? Are ou some kind of a cop?"

"No," Julio said solemnly, "I'm ot *policia*. And I did not do this or that...junk." He paused for a moment, the words he spoke next coming now like some foreign language.

"I'm hiding out, so I've got no se for dope — too risky. I hate it nyway. They killed my wife with t years ago. They made me finish job by using her, but they OD'd her anyway while I was doing it. t was a lousy deal...a bad ontract."

The one called Stitch peered at ulio. "Who are you? You ain't to Mex. You a mechanic — a ontract man?"

Julio was silent for a few econds. Then he said, "Let's ay I used to be that." He considered for another few seconds, hen uttered a name for the first ime in many years. After all, he hought, the man would not be epeating it.

"Sounds familiar..." the man aid, coughing, then he looked losely at Julio again. "Jesus! I eard! You're the guy...ten, ifteen years ago in Dallas! Noboby thought that radical little

whimp would do the job right, so they got a backup man — a pro. You!"

Julio nodded. "Me. I wanted to retire with a big score, so I took the job and I wish to hell I hadn't. It was a... bummer. Lost my wife, the money, everything. It was..."

But the man was past hearing. Julio sighed and stood up, looking down at him.

"Not too many of us old pros left, eh *hombre*?" He uncocked the Colt, holstered it, then went back to the hut to get the suitcase he had almost forgotten during the fight.

He opened the suitcase and, taking the plastic bags inside, cut them open one by one with his pocket knife, letting the lethal, powdery substance drift away in the gentle night wind.

When it was done, he found his cigaret papers and tobacco and rolled a smoke. He would fix the car, leave it by where the plane had landed, bury the bodies and the case, then return home. Maybe the police would come, but if they did, they would see they were too late. Case closed. No one knew anything to tell them.

And, he thought, the tiger, as all tigers eventually do, had grown old and tired — finally.

Well, perhaps not *too* tired. He smiled. He hoped that his supper had not grown too cold and that his wife would be very relieved — and very glad — to see him home again.

Grief Counselor

by JULIE SMITH

Sometimes sympathy, like love,
can be a little too much.

I STARTED to give Sidney Castille my usual rappy-rap. "This is Jack Beatts," I said, "with the Grief Protection Unit of the county coroner's office . . ."

That was as far as I got before he hung up.

Sidney's wife, Dawn, had died two days before in a freak accident. He'd found her with a broken neck and her copy of *Vince Mattrone's 30-Day Yoga Actualizing Plan* lying on the floor beside her. It was open to the section on headstands.

I'd called him because it was my job. After the death certificates are signed, they're sent to me or one of the other grief counsellors so we can get in touch with the victim's families.

As soon as Sidney hung up, I knew he was out of touch with his feelings. He was in the first phase of the grief cycle — what we psychologists call the stage of "disbelief and denial." He was refusing to deal with death.

That's normal and that's okay, but I wanted Sidney to know he had alternatives. I had things I could share with him. So I decided to pay him a visit.

I meditated a few minutes to get myself centered and then drove my Volkswagen over to Sidney's hours on Bay Laurel Lane. It was a typical northern California redwood house set back from the road in a grove of eucalyptus. Smoke was coming out of the chimney.

As I got closer, I could see the living room through sliding glass doors that opened onto a deck. Several cats prowled in the room like tigers in a forest. Dozens of plants hung from the ceiling and took up most of the floor space as well. There was nothing to sit on but oversized cushions.

On the far wall of the room was a fireplace with a pile of books in front of it. A man was squatting there, burning the books, feeding them one by one into the fireplace.

"Sidney?" I said. "I'm Jack Beatts from . . ."

"Oh, yes, the man from the coroner's office."

He let me in and waved me to a cushion, but he didn't seem pleased about it. In fact, he went right back to feeding the fire.

"Sidney," I said, "I'm going to be up front with you. When you

hung up, I sensed I'd better get over here right away."

"Yeah, that's what I thought. I guess I panicked when you said 'coroner's office.'"

"A lot of people are uptight about that. But I'm going to ask you to forget about the bureaucracy and just be open with me."

"I guess we may as well get it over with." He put a copy of *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* in the fireplace and turned around to face me. A tear rolled down each cheek.

"That's it, Sidney," I said. "Flow with it. Experience your feelings."

"You talk like Dawn."

"I know how it is, Sidney. Everything reminds you of her, doesn't it? But that's okay at this stage. I don't want you to be negative about it."

"Negative!" he snorted. "What am I supposed to . . ."

"I'll bet those are Dawn's books you're burning." He nodded. "And it looks like you're about to take the cats to the pound. You're getting rid of everything that reminds you of Dawn, aren't you?"

Tears came into his eyes again. "I couldn't take it any more, Mr. Beatts. I never should have married her in the first place."

"I know where you're coming from Sidney. You felt inadequate because you were a lot older than Dawn, right?"

"She was twenty-two," he said,

"and looking for a Daddy. A rich daddy. And I was just lonely, I guess. I picked her up hitchhiking on my way out here from Ohio after my first wife died." He winced. "But *she* died of natural causes."

"Death is natural, Sidney. I mean life is a circle, you know? I want you to choose to recognize that. And if burning books is what's happening for you, I don't want you to feel guilty behind it. Just acknowledge that it's okay."

"Look, are you going to take me in or what?"

"Take you in? Oh, you mean to the Grief Center."

"Is *that* what they call it in California?"

"For sure. We can rap anywhere you like if the vibes are wrong here."

"What is a vibe, Mr. Beatts? If I heard Dawn use that word once, I . . ."

"Now stay loose, Sidney. I hear what you're saying and I sense you're uptight behind it. You couldn't relate to Dawn's lifestyle, right?"

He began picking up cats and taking them to the carriers on the deck. I didn't want to blow the energy we had going, so I followed along beside him.

"She was all caught up in what they call the human potential movement," he said. "Transactional analysis, transcendental meditation, self-actualization, bioenergetics, biofeedback . . ."

"She must have been a heavy lady."

"She talked funny. Like you. And she cooked things like wheat germ souffle. And she wanted the house to be 'natural.' You couldn't go to sleep without a cat curled around your neck, or a spider plant tickling your nose. It got so every time I saw her do that crazy yogurt . . ."

"Yoga."

He closed the last carrier and we went back into the house.

"I used to call it yogurt to annoy her," he said, squatting by the books again. "Anyway, when she started to stand on her head, she'd do it first with her feet against the wall and then she'd let go of the wall and stick her legs up in the air. Well, every time I saw her with her feet like that, getting little toeprints all over the paint, I'd think how easy it would be just to grab her and . . ." He stopped.

"And what?"

"And snap her neck."

I nearly clapped him on the back I was so relieved. At last he'd gotten his energy flowing in a positive way! "I have to acknowledge you, Sidney," I said. "It's really a far out thing to see someone being so open about his fantasies."

Sidney tried to speak, but he couldn't. He took out a handkerchief and blew his nose. Sometimes you have to hurt people to help them so I took a chance.

"You killed her, didn't you, Sidney?" I said.

He kept his eyes down as he put the handkerchief back in his pocket. "You knew all along," he said finally.

"For sure," I said supportively. "Self-recrimination is very common in the first stage of the grief cycle and I want you to know that it's okay."

"Okay?" he said. "I don't understand."

"A lot of people get on that kind of trip when something like this happens. You and Dawn weren't getting along and you feel guilty about it now, right? You think she died because of something in your karma."

The way Sidney looked at me I could tell he was surprised. He didn't really expect anyone else to understand. He started to speak, but I stopped him.

"That's okay," I said. "You know? Because it's only the first part of the cycle. You know what's next? Personality reorganization! Sidney, you've got a really positive thing to look forward to."

Sidney sat down on one of the cushions and started to laugh. It doesn't happen often that somebody really flashes on the whole cycle like that, and it was a far-out thing to see.

"Mr. Beatts," he said. "I don't remotely understand where you're coming from . . ."

"Don't try, man."

"But I think I can flow with it."

The Watchman

by D.H. LASTINE

It was sweet while it lasted. Jake would rob the houses while Mike did sentry duty. But nothing lasts forever.

THE NIGHT IS QUIETER than usual and that always gives me the spooks — like impending doom. You'd think I'd be used to this by now, but I still get scared. I keep remembering how it all began, and I can't help worrying how it's going to end.

I met Jake in Harry's Bar two months ago. We hit it off right away. We were both out of work, and beer was as luxurious a drink as we could afford. We tipped a few and laughed a lot and bar-hopped all night, playing pool for drinks. We made a perfect pair at the pool table — never losing.

We struck up quite a friendship that night. From then on we met in Harry's every Tuesday after picking up our unemployment checks. We seemed to do pretty good together as far as getting extra money. No one could stop us at the pool table. We'd part every Tuesday night at least \$50 richer.

This went on for three Tuesdays. On the fourth Tuesday, Jake was an hour late. I was just ready to leave when he showed up. I could tell he was excited. He

grabbed my arm and ushered me into a back booth.

"Hey, Mike, he said in a loud whisper," I assume you've noticed how well we work together. We think alike, work alike, play alike.

All this time I just sat sipping my beer and keeping still. Any plan to make more bread was of interest to me.

"This guy will furnish us with wheels and a CB radio. We'll rip off rich cats' houses. You'll be in the car on channel four and I'll be inside the house monitoring four. If you hear sirens or see anything suspicious, you break the channel and warn me. I'll get out fast. It's foolproof."

"The reason I'm late," he continued, "is I was out looking up a buddy of mine. He's a pawn-broker, but he fences on the side. In fact, I've been pawning off most of my stuff the past five months just to keep going. You get to know a guy under those circumstances. Here's the plan."

"Sounds good, Jake. When do we start?"

"Tonight, if you're game."

We agreed and decided on CB handles — he was "Sneak Thief" and I was "Watchman."

So here I am again. So far, so good, We've been at this six weeks now, and the money has been good enough to bring our standard of living up quite a bit.

Jake's only in the house about 15 minutes. He never gets hog-gish. The fence has taught him good. He knows where to look and what to look for. It's always worth quite a lot and easy to carry.

I remember one night about three weeks ago, I panicked. I saw a black-and-white coming slowly down the road. I grabbed the CB mike and for a split second I almost forgot what I was supposed to do.

"Break Four. How about ya, Sneak Thief?"

"You got 'im, Watchman."

"The weather's getting cloudy, so the fishing has been called off. Clear here."

"Clear here."

I drove off slowly and picked Jake up at the corner. He was empty-handed. He took very few chances. This was quite a racket.

Last night we decided to really celebrate our new found "jobs." We both got pretty loaded and really lived it up. We hit some nicer bars and drank better booze.

"By the way, Mike, it's time you knew a little more about this operation. The fence is Barney from Barney's Three Ball Empo-

rium on North 77th Street. He's got twelve guys working for him now and things are looking good. He's checked you out and said he wants to meet you tomorrow night.

"He's got plans for expanding. I'll pick you up at eight tomorrow night for a hit and afterwards we'll drive over. It's a meet with all the guys and it's *big*!"

The shades just went up in the house signaling it's time to pick him up. I drove through the alley real slow. He jumped out from some bushes into the car and we took off.

We had to drive quite a ways to 77th Street so we headed right there.

We were let in the back door by Barney, a short, balding man about 55 years old. He took us down to the cellar where the lights wouldn't show from the street. We were evidently the last to get there as the room looked full. In a far corner there was a door and Jake took the night's haul in there.

When he opened the door I could see the room was full of loot. There must have been a half million dollars worth of stolen goods in there.

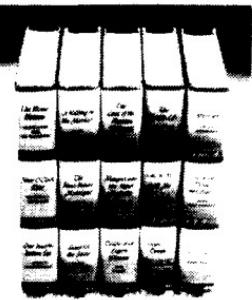
I felt in my pocket — the homing device was still in place. The cops should be arriving any minute. It had been a long three months, but this assignment was finally nearing the end.

Barney was just calling the meeting to order when the cops broke down the door.

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